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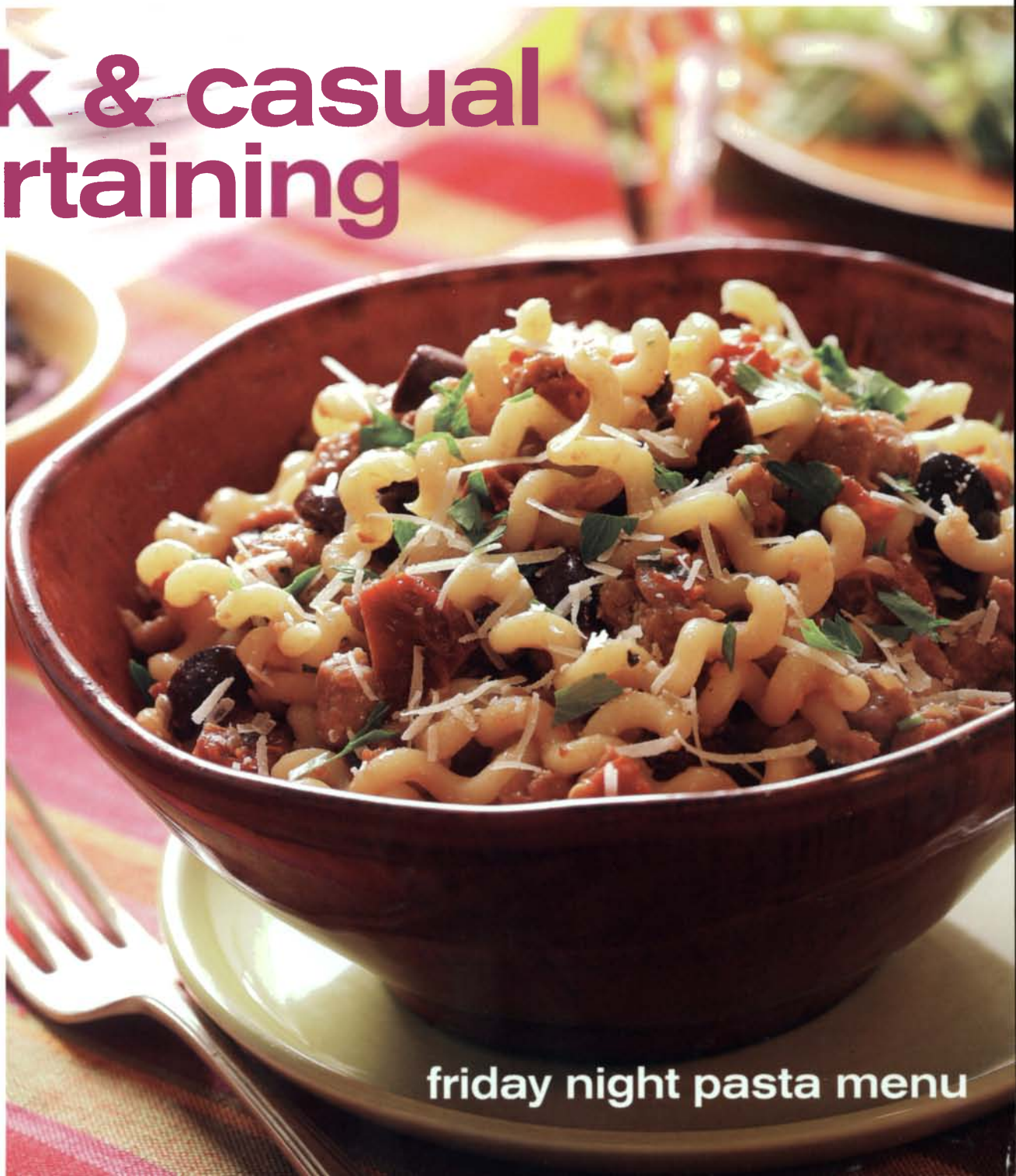
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friday night pasta menu



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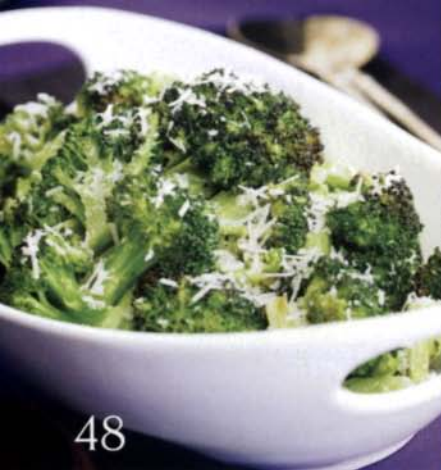


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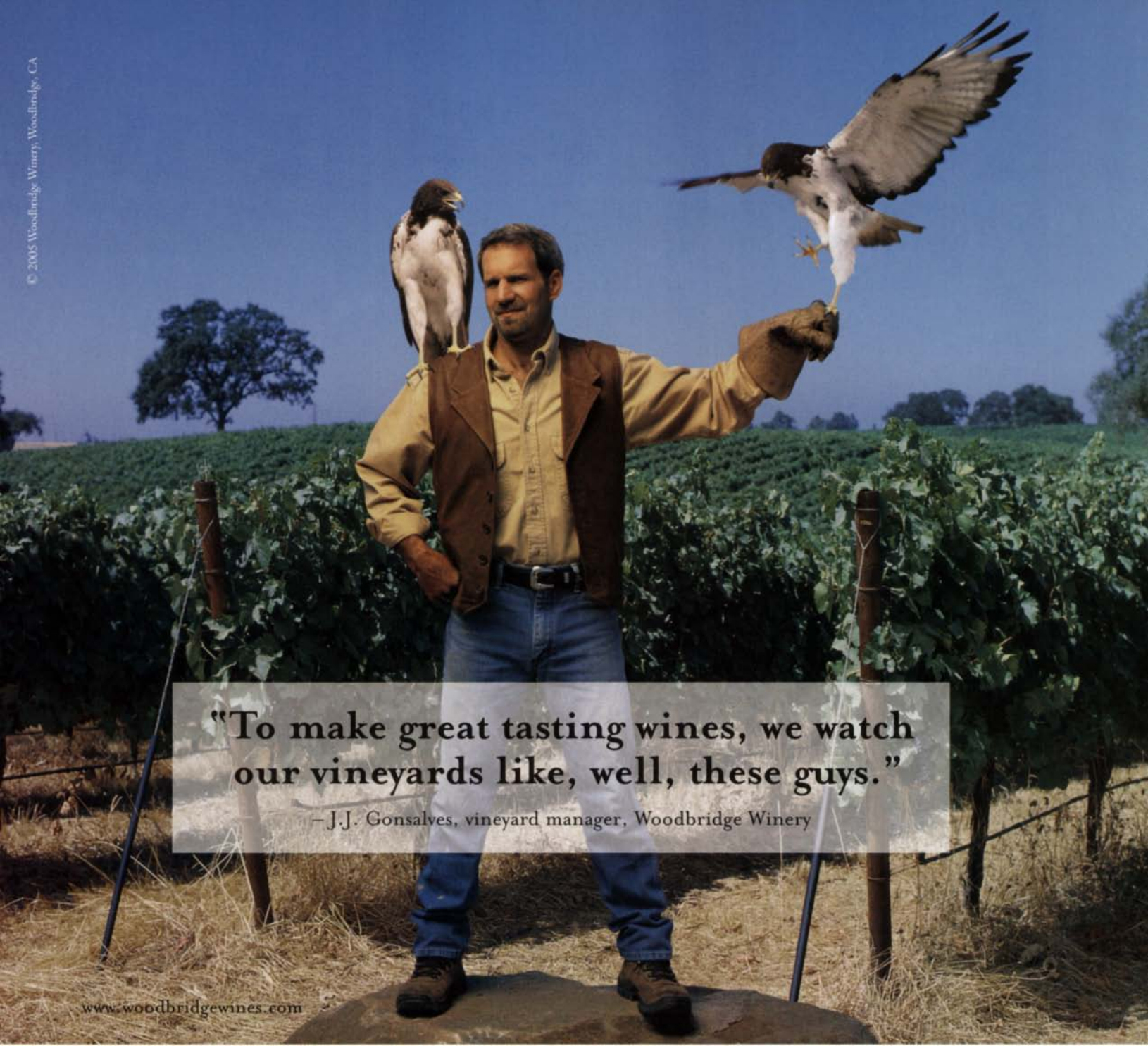
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A man in a tan shirt and brown vest stands in a vineyard, holding a falcon on his gloved hand. Another falcon is perched on his shoulder. The background shows rows of grapevines under a clear blue sky.

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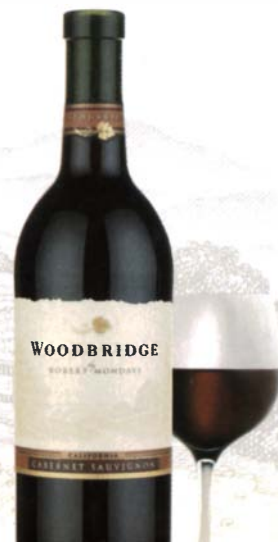
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Entertaining When Time Is Short

At this time of year, you're likely to be entertaining friends and family more than usual, and yet you're also likely to have less time than usual to prepare fancy and elaborate meals. We can help. We've put together four no-fuss menus from the recipes in this issue. They don't take an entire day to prepare, and your guests will love them. Also, don't miss the fabulous Friday Night Menu on p. 54, with a timeline for getting a delicious dinner for six on the table in 90 minutes. And when you're ready to go all out, we've got a menu (below) that's sure to impress. Remember to check yields on each recipe in case you need to adjust them to fit your needs.

Stress-Free But Special

For this to be truly low stress, make the shortbread a day ahead. The afternoon of the dinner, prep all your ingredients. Serve the mussels first and cook the lamb chops while the broccoli is roasting in the oven.

Steamed Mussels with Wine, Garlic & Parsley, p. 56

Lamb Chops with Pomegranate Red Wine Sauce, p. 86c

Roasted Broccoli with Lemon & Pecorino, p. 49

Nutty Chocolate Shortbread Wedges, p. 62

Festive Brunch

Assemble the strata a day ahead and bake it while you're putting the salad together. Just keep in mind that you need some time to marinate the onions and that the pears—though quick to prep—take an hour to roast.

Baby Greens with Mango & Marinated Onion, p. 57

Leek & Morel Strata, p. 67

Sweet Wine & Honey Roasted Pears, p. 18

Putting-on-the-Ritz Holiday Dinner

If you'd rather serve pork or veal instead of beef as your pièce de résistance, you can choose one of the other crusted roasts on pp. 41-45. The chocolate cake is rich and decadent as it is. To dress it up, add whipped cream or a berry sauce and a sprinkle of confectioners' sugar.

Roast Sirloin of Beef with a Classic Breadcrumb, Garlic & Herb Crust, p. 42

Creamy Horseradish-Mustard Sauce, p. 42

Twice-Baked Potatoes with Crème Fraîche & Chives, p. 46

Brown-Butter Green Beans with Pine Nuts, p. 10

Flourless Chocolate Cake with Chocolate Glaze, p. 61

Inspired By Asia

If your guests aren't fish lovers, you can replace the salmon with Chicken Breasts with Red Thai Curry Peanut Sauce on p. 86c. For a fast and easy dessert, finish off the meal with store-bought ginger ice cream topped with a little crystallized ginger.

Asian Sesame Beef in Crispy Wonton Cups, p. 86c

Asian-Style Glazed Salmon with Wild Mushroom Salad, p. 86c

Broccoli & Cauliflower Sauté with Ginger & Garlic, p. 50

Quick & Comforting

You can make the ragoût well ahead of time. Just reheat it and spoon it over just-toasted crostini. The pudding can also be prepared a day in advance, and the pasta is a breeze to make.

Wild Mushroom Ragoût on Toasted Crostini, p. 66

Pasta with Sausage, Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream, p. 56

No-Cook Chocolate Puddings with Whipped Cream, p. 60



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from the editor

Finding Your Entertaining Groove

I love to entertain, but I have to admit, parties at my house are never perfect excerpts from the pages of *Amy Vanderbilt's Complete Book of Etiquette*. Occasionally the dog swipes a platter of hors d'oeuvres off the counter. Often a glass of wine spills on the living room carpet. And sometimes, despite being the editor of *Fine Cooking* magazine, I even wind up serving something that's not perfectly cooked (yikes!). Most often this is because I got caught up in a good conversation and forgot to check the steak on the grill or the crostini under the broiler.

Despite a rather formal upbringing, I've adopted a more carefree attitude about entertaining. As a result, I have friends and family over more often than I might otherwise, and I get the benefit of enjoying their company without stressing out too much. I bring all this up in the hope that, this holiday season, you'll remember that there's no time like the present to enjoy your friends and family. We cooks can still have fun in the kitchen and enjoy our company, too, if we plan tasty, but not overly ambitious, menus.

In this spirit, we offer you some great ideas for truly casual entertaining in this issue. We've got our first ever "Friday Night Menu" (real-world tested), which you can prepare after work in 90 minutes. Our menus section on p. 8 features four other low-stress menus from recipes in this issue. Or how about a party where you just serve coffee (or wine) and some sweets? On p. 58, there are five fabulous chocolate desserts that you can make from basic pantry and fridge staples. If you want to have friends over at the last minute, you won't have to run all over town looking for special ingredients.

And if you do decide to gussy things up and entertain a bit more formally (highly likely during the holidays), pick one impressive dish—like the Roast Sirloin of Beef with a Breadcrumb, Garlic & Herb Crust on p. 42—and round it out with a crowd-pleasing make-ahead like Twice-Baked Potatoes with Crème Fraîche & Chives (p. 46) and a simple green bean dish with a pleasing twist like the one at right.

If for some reason you don't have a good excuse for entertaining this season, make one up. It's the best way I know to do something special for the people you love—and indulge your own passion for cooking at the same time.

—Susie Middleton, editor



Brown-Butter Green Beans with Pine Nuts

Serves four to six.

A little twist on green beans amandine.

1 pound fresh green beans, trimmed
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ cup pine nuts, coarsely chopped
Kosher salt
2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice
Freshly ground black pepper

Bring a 4- to 6-quart pot (like a Dutch oven) of well-salted water to a boil over high heat. Add the green beans and cook until tender to the bite, 5 to 7 minutes. Drain the beans in a colander. Return the pot to the stove over low heat and melt the butter in the pot. Add the pine nuts and ¼ teaspoon salt, turn the heat to medium, and cook, stirring constantly, until the butter browns and the pine nuts turn mostly golden, 3 to 5 minutes. Turn off the heat (or remove the pot from the stove) and add the green beans and ½ teaspoon salt to the pot. Toss to combine thoroughly, sprinkle with the lemon juice, and toss again. Taste and adjust the seasoning if necessary. Serve warm.

Make-ahead: You can boil the green beans ahead of time, but you'll need to rewarm them a bit longer in the brown butter, covered, over low heat.

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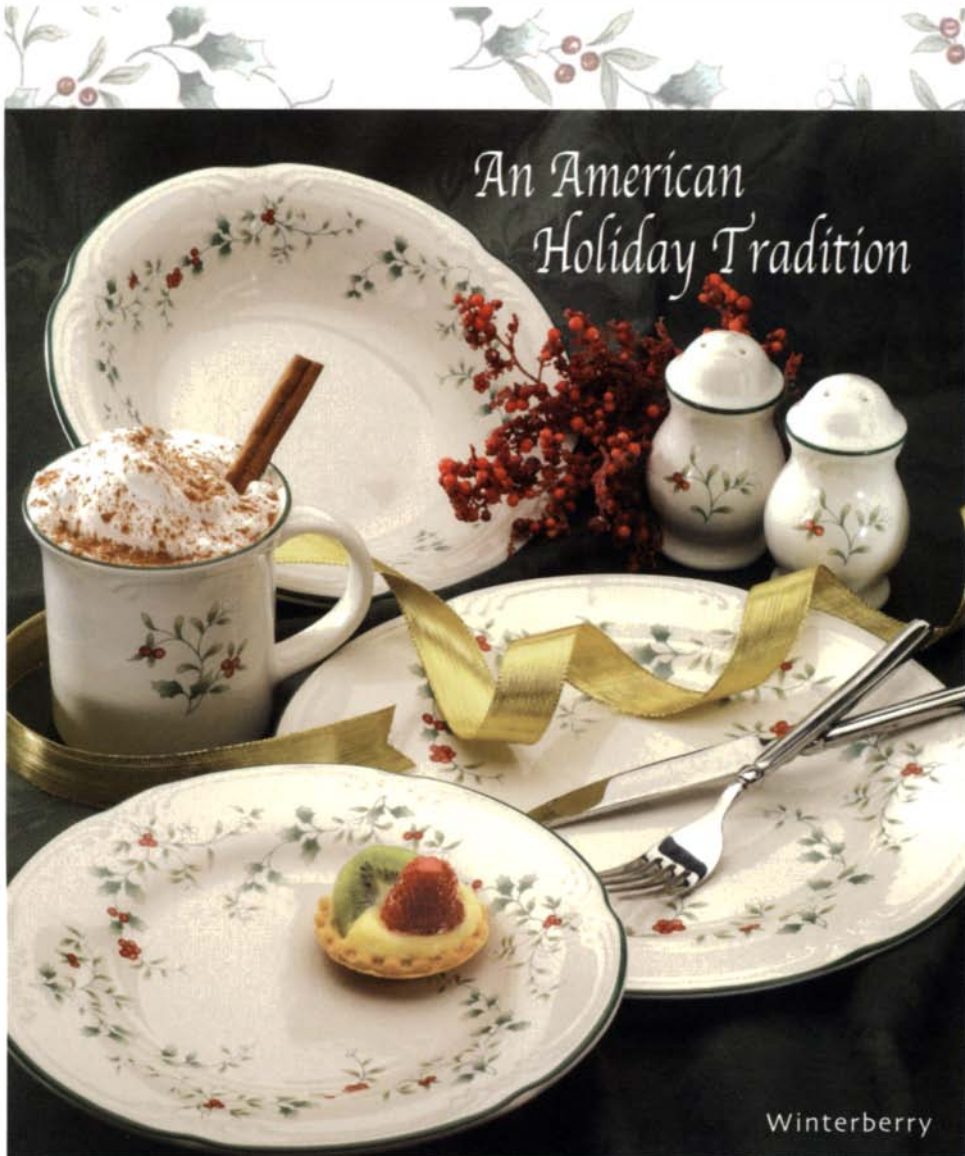
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from our readers

A well-loved (and used) magazine

A good way to tell how successful an issue of any cooking magazine is how it looks after a few weeks. The more worn it is, the better it is. My last copy of *Fine Cooking* (#73) is truly ragged from living in the kitchen and being well used. The pages are dog-eared and stained, and even dotted with side notes I've jotted down. I love cooking with my 3-year-old and 7-year-old daughters, and they really enjoyed making the rustic fruit tarts. My husband has been grilling chicken and making the Tex-Mex recipes, and we are still cooking from this great issue. Your choices were simple, with great flavors that are everyday but gourmet at the same time. Thank you for making great choices and entertaining our whole family.

—Joyce Revoir, via email

Attention, chile lovers

A friend has been recommending *Fine Cooking* magazine for quite

some time, and I finally picked up the issue #73. I have to wonder why I waited so long—this is the most interesting cooking magazine I have read (and believe me, I've sampled many). I was intrigued by the "fresh green chiles" story, as I had just made chicken/tomatillo enchiladas, a corn chowder, and salsas for ten of my closest friends the week before—each dish requiring roasted green chiles.

So on that note, here is my tip: When roasting chiles in the oven, I line the pan with foil, set the chiles on top, and char them under the broiler. Then, instead of transferring them to a covered bowl, as is often recommended to steam off the skins, I simply use the foil to wrap and steam the chiles after roasting. If you are lucky, this results in two fewer items to wash (i.e., the roasting pan and the extra bowl).

—Cathy Carter,
Ann Arbor, Michigan ♦

We need your eyes & ears

When testing recipes and coming up with story ideas, we often ask ourselves whether this or that ingredient is widely enough available for all our readers. By signing up to become a *Fine Cooking* reader volunteer, you can help us answer these questions (and in the process, get a preview of what's coming up in future issues). Through periodic emails, we'll ask you to check your local supermarkets for ingredient availability—it could be anything from which brands of chocolate chips you can get to how a certain cut of beef is labeled. To join our network of reader scouts, send an email to fc@taunton.com with your name and location, and we'll add you to our list.

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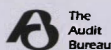
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The classic French bistro fare at **Gordon Hamersley's** eponymous Boston restaurant has inspired many imitators over the years—with good reason. And when it comes to roasts with crisp, savory crusts, we, too, are more than happy to follow his lead. The recipes in "Roasts with the Most" on p. 40 are knock-outs. In addition to his duties as chef-owner of Hamersley's Bistro, Gordon has written an award-winning cookbook, *Bistro Cooking at Home*, and several articles for *Fine Cooking*.



Abigail Johnson Dodge

A contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, **Molly Stevens** ("Twice-Baked Potatoes," p. 46), co-wrote *One Potato, Two Potatoes* with Roy Finamore. She's also the author of Williams-Sonoma's *New England*. For her latest book, *All About Braising: The Art of Uncomplicated Cooking*, Molly nabbed both a James Beard award and an IACP cookbook award.



Gordon Hamersley

In the past few years, **Tasha DeSerio** ("Four Ways to Cook Broccoli," p. 46) has written a number of wonderful stories about vegetables for *Fine Cooking*. For this issue, we asked her to tackle broccoli, a subject close to her heart—it's her two-year-old son's favorite vegetable. Formerly a cook at Chez Panisse Restaurant & Café, Tasha is a cooking teacher, food writer, and the proprietor of Olive Green Catering in Berkeley, California.



Joanne McAllister Smart

We asked contributing editor **Tony Rosenfeld** ("Kung Pao Chicken," p. 52, and "Dried Mushrooms," p. 64) for a quick and easy weeknight stir-fry, and we got just that: a wonderfully flavored version of the Chinese classic, Kung Pao Chicken. In this issue, he also teaches us how to

use his favorite pantry ingredient, dried mushrooms. When he's not writing and developing recipes for *Fine Cooking*, Tony works as a Boston-based food writer and the part-owner of b.good, a healthy fast-food restaurant. He's also working on a chicken cookbook that will be on book shelves in early 2007.

For **Joanne McAllister Smart** ("Friday Night with Friends," p. 54), the trick to week-night entertaining is quick-cooking dishes: steamed mussels, pasta, a salad, and a dessert cheese course that can all be pulled together in less than an hour and a half. A former editor at *Fine Cooking*, Joanne is the co-author of chef Scott Conant's *New Italian Cooking*. She is also the co-author of *Bistro Cooking at Home* and editor of *Fine Cooking's Cooking New American*, both IACP award winners.

Fine Cooking contributing editor **Abigail Johnson Dodge** ("Chocolate Desserts on Demand," p. 58) was the founding director of *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen. She is the author of many cookbooks, including *Great Fruit Desserts*, *The Kid's Cookbook*, *Kids' Baking*, *Williams-Sonoma's Dessert*, and, most recently, *The Weekend Baker*. When she's not writing and developing recipes, Abby travels and teaches cooking classes across the country.

Scott Phillips has been taking gorgeous photos for *Fine Cooking* for many years. Scott graduated from Rochester Institute of Technology with a BFA in professional photographic illustration, and although he's the photography manager for all of The Taunton Press, we like to count him as one of our own *Fine Cooking* team members.



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Easy Tiramisu

Estimated Times:
Preparation: 20 min
Refrigeration: 2 hours

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 pkg. (2.8 oz.) Milk or Dark Chocolate NESTLÉ EUROPEAN STYLE Mousse Mix
- 2/3 cup milk
- 1 pkg. (8 oz.) mascarpone cheese
- 1 cup strong-brewed coffee or espresso, cooled to room temperature
- 1 to 2 tablespoons brandy
- 2 pkg. (3 to 3.5 oz. each) ladyfingers, divided
- Shaved or grated chocolate

PREPARE mousse mix according to steps 1 and 2 of package directions, using 2/3 cup milk. Fold mascarpone cheese into prepared mousse.

COMBINE coffee and brandy in small bowl. Line bottom of 8-inch-square baking dish with half of ladyfingers; drizzle with half of coffee mixture. Spoon half of mousse mixture over ladyfingers; top with remaining ladyfingers. Drizzle with remaining coffee mixture. Spoon remaining mousse mixture over ladyfingers. Sprinkle with chocolate. Refrigerate for 2 hours before serving.

Makes 8 servings



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pears

BY RUTH LIVELY

Enjoy them in all their colorful variety

A perfectly ripe pear is, to me, one of the best things in the world to eat. The flesh is creamy, smooth, and sweet, and the juices so abundant they run down your chin. Happily, finding the perfect pear is easy. It's a matter of gentle handling, a little know-how, and some patience.

From firm to perfectly ripe

Pears are picked when the fruit is mature, but not yet ripe because, left to ripen on the tree, they develop deposits of lignin, which makes the flesh grainy. If the pears are very hard when you buy them, they may need several days to ripen. You can hasten the process by storing them in a closed paper bag. Once ripe, pears will stay in good shape for a couple of days, but for longer storage, hold them in the refrigerator. Ripe pears should be handled gently, as they bruise

Raw or cooked, pears add tons of flavor

Pears inspire thoughts of dessert (try the roasted pears on p. 18), but don't overlook using them in a savory context. Sautéed or stewed pears complement roasted meats, and fresh pears are fabulous in salads.

Savory dishes

Make a sweet-sour pear **chutney** by simmering chopped pears and onion, raisins, and an equal amount of sugar and cider vinegar.

For an enticing **appetizer**, fill whole Belgian endive leaves with some crumbled blue, a few toasted pecan pieces, a little pepper, and top with a pear sliver.

Tuck pear slices into a **sandwich** of smoked turkey and Brie on multi-grain bread. Add a dab of chutney or cranberry sauce for punch.

Compose a **salad** of fennel slivers and pear slices tossed in a lemony vinaigrette on a bed of watercress or arugula, topped with shavings of Parmigiano.

Sweet endings

Sauté sliced pears in butter and brown sugar, let cool, and use them in your favorite recipe for **upside-down cake** or as a topping for vanilla ice cream.

Make a simple **rustic tart**. Sprinkle sugar on a round of

pastry dough, arrange thinly sliced pears on top, sprinkle on more sugar, dot with butter, and grate on some nutmeg. Fold in the outer inch or two of pastry, pleating as necessary, and bake at 400°F until the pastry is golden and crisp.

Poach ripe or nearly ripe pear halves, peeled and cored, in a simple syrup of 2 cups water or wine to 1 cup sugar. Include strips of lemon zest, a vanilla bean, and a few star anise pods or whole cloves. Chill and serve in a little of the poaching liquid, topped with a dollop of whipped cream or crème fraîche.

Pears from September to June

Though most of the year, you'll find several varieties of pears at the market, each with different colors and textures.



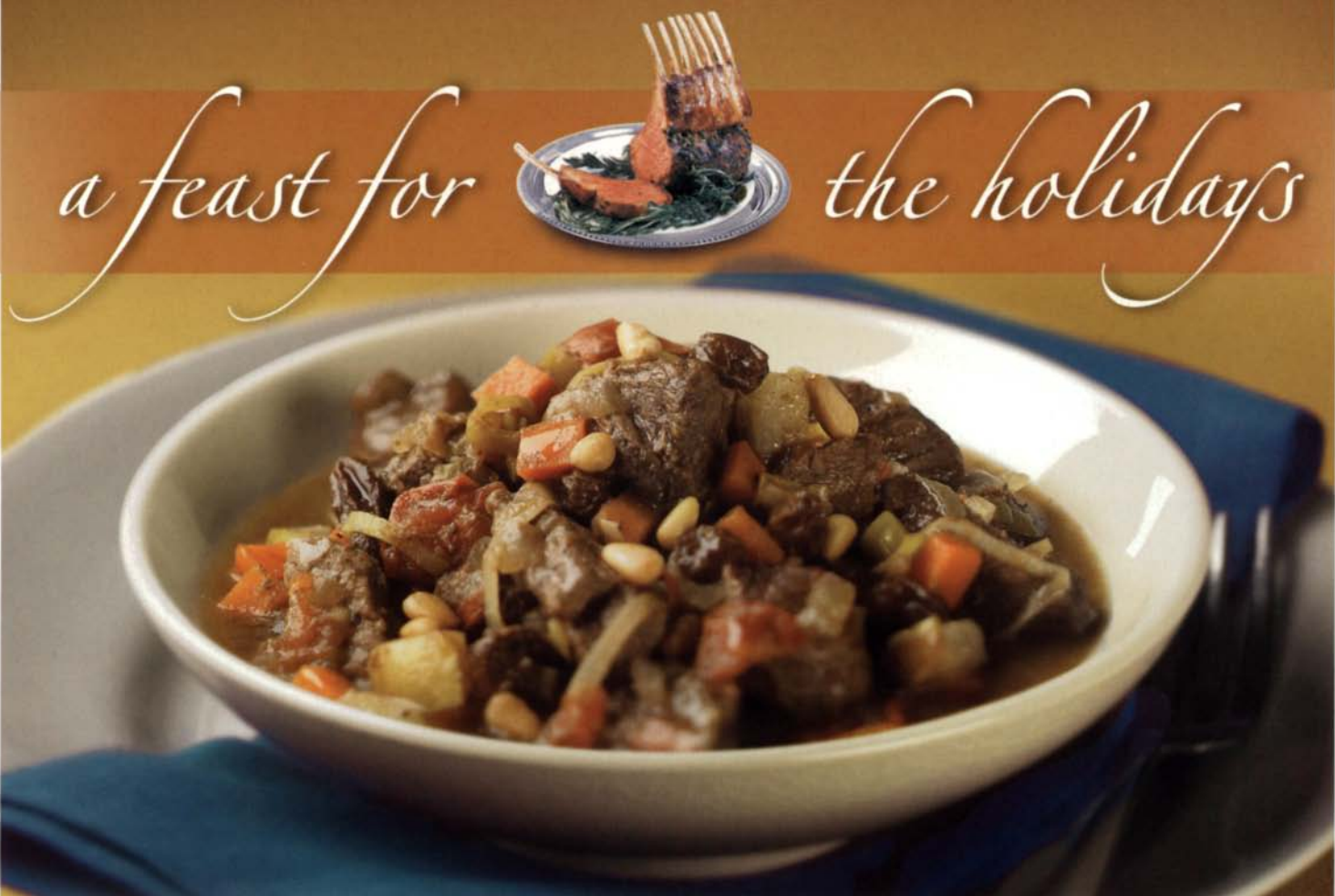
Bartlett A ripe Red Bartlett is bright red; a ripe Bartlett is bright yellow. Aromatic and sweet, this pear is perfect eaten raw. It's the first pear to appear in late August.



Comice This very sweet, very juicy pear is wonderful raw. Its season starts in early September and lasts into December.



Forelle The slightly crunchy texture of this pear, which appears in September, means it holds up well when cooked, but it's also delicious raw and in salads.



an easy meal for any day

Australian Lamb makes a delicious holiday highlight. It's also easy and quick to prepare for everyday meals. Flavorful chops, shanks or legs are perfect for roasting, grilling or braising in minutes. And because Australian Lamb grazes on lush, green pastures, it's mild, lean and rich in nutrients—ideal for everyone at your table, any time of the year.

Sweet and Spicy **Australian Lamb Leg** Tagine with Warm Couscous

1½–2 lb. boneless Australian Lamb leg
 1 tsp ground cumin
 1 tsp ground cinnamon
 1 tsp ground ginger
 1 tsp ground coriander
 2 tbsp olive oil, divided
 1 onion, chopped
 1 leek, white part only, sliced
 2 medium carrots, chopped
 1½ cups chicken stock or broth
 ½ cup raisins or sliced dates
 2 large tomatoes, coarsely chopped
 1 pear, diced
 cooked couscous, warm
 ¼ cup toasted almonds or pine nuts
 salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1. Trim and dice lamb into bite-size pieces. Combine next 4 ingredients and divide in half. In a heavy-based skillet, heat 1 tbsp of oil over high heat, add the lamb and half the spices. Cook, stirring until browned. Transfer lamb to a plate and drain fat from pan.
2. Heat remaining oil and spices in the same pan over medium heat about 20-30 seconds. Add onion, leek and carrots. Cook until onion is softened. Return the meat to the pan with the stock, raisins and tomatoes and stir well. Cover, reduce heat to low, simmer for 1 hour.
3. Add pear and simmer, uncovered, for 20-30 minutes or until lamb is tender and sauce is thick. Spoon tagine over the warm couscous, sprinkle with the almonds and serve.

For easy lamb recipes, store locations, and your **FREE** 32-page cookbook, visit www.australian-lamb.com/fc today.

Free cookbook available while supplies last. Visit www.australian-lamb.com or write to Meat & Livestock Australia, PO Box 34176, Washington, DC 20043. © 2005 Meat & Livestock Australia.



Fresh, Easy and Delicious.

with the lightest bump.

The best way to judge ripeness is to gently press the neck of the fruit near the stem with your thumb; if the flesh gives, the pear is ready to eat. I also use the sniff test. A ripe pear will often give off a delicious, sweet aroma. For cooking, pears should generally be “firm-ripe,” or just at the beginning of the ripening window. In this case, look for ripe fruit that yields only slightly when pressed near the stem.

Pears’ subtle flavor calls for simple treatment, one that doesn’t overwhelm them with too many other flavors, but this doesn’t mean you should avoid assertive partners. Think of the classic combination of pears and pungent blue cheese. Pears have many good flavor mates, from mild to powerful. Butter, cheese, cream, and caramel add richness and roundness. Nuts add crunch and a toasty flavor. Other good flavor companions include nutmeg, cinnamon (use a light touch), star anise, cardamom, vanilla beans, rosemary, thyme, mint, and any of the lemon herbs, such as lemon verbena.

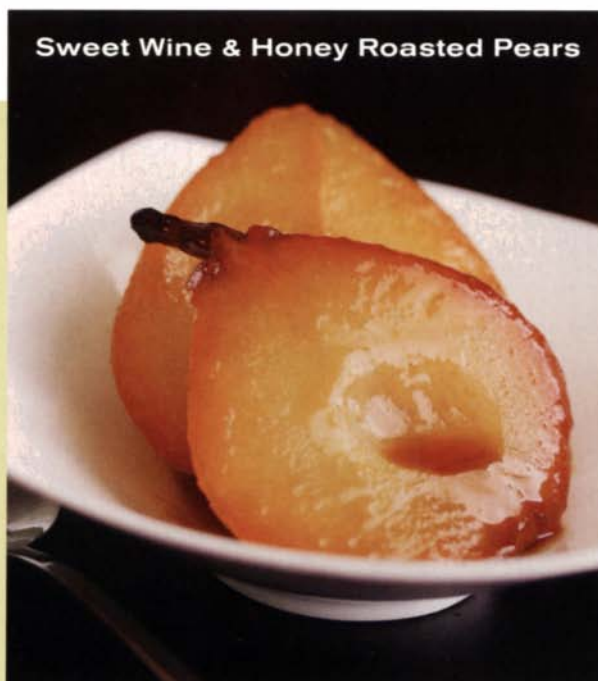
Serves four.

If you want to get fancy, you can top the pears with ice cream, Devon cream, crème fraîche or mascarpone, but plain old heavy cream is awfully good, and has the virtue of simplicity. A scattering of toasted almonds would also be welcome.

4 firm-ripe pears (any variety)
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened
2 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons honey

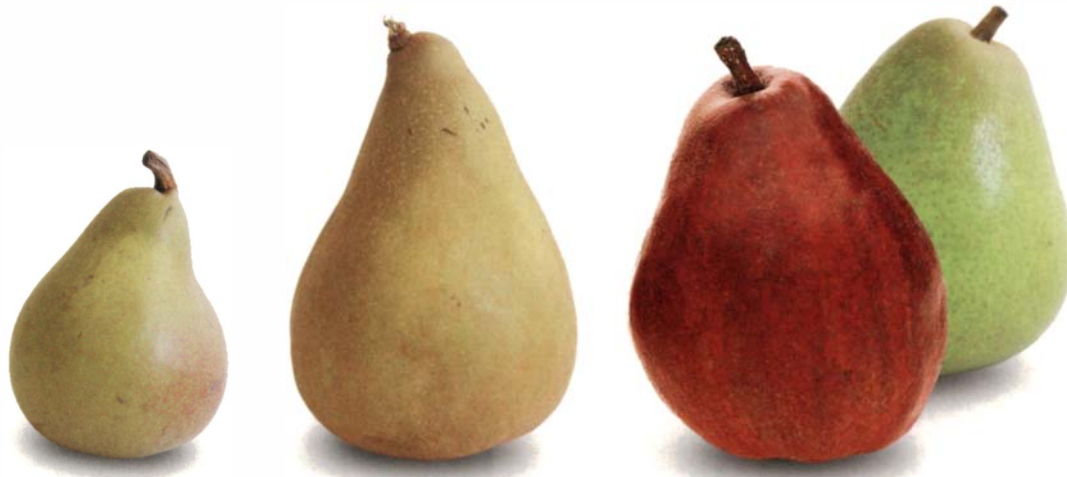
½ cup sweet dessert wine, such as a late-harvest Muscat or a Viognier like Bonny Doon’s Viognier Doux
⅓ to ½ cup heavy cream, at room temperature, for serving

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Peel, halve, and core the pears. Smear the butter over the bottom of a 9x13-inch baking dish or small roasting pan. Set the pear halves cut side down in the dish.



Drizzle 1 teaspoon of honey over each pear half. Pour in the sweet wine. Roast for 40 minutes. Remove the dish from the oven and, using pot holders, tilt the dish so the juices pool in one corner. With a spoon, baste each pear with some of the juices. Continue to roast until the juices cook down to a glazy consistency and the pears are very tender and take on a light toasted color, another 15 to 20 minutes. Lift up the cut side of a pear; it should look nicely caramelized. Turn off the oven and leave the pears in the oven to keep warm until serving time (the liquid will continue to thicken and the pears will brown a bit more).

If the juices have completely evaporated at serving time, add a tablespoon or two of hot water to the pan and swirl to recreate a syrupy glaze. Drizzle the glaze over each pear. Serve warm and pass a pitcher of heavy cream to pour over. Leftovers are good eaten at room temperature or warmed gently.



Seckel The smallest of pears, it has extremely sweet, very dense, crisp flesh, and it’s lovely poached or roasted. Its season is September through December.

Bosc It comes into season in September and can be available well into spring. Its dense, grainy flesh has an elegant, aromatic flavor that’s perfect for cooking.

Anjou Juicy and very sweet, it becomes creamy when ripe. It appears in October and is available well into the early summer.

tip:

A melon baller does a neat job of coring pears. Or use the smallest paring knife you have (I use a 2½-inch blade), cutting with only the tip of the blade.

Ruth Lively cooks, writes, and gardens in New Haven, Connecticut. ♦

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Ghirardelli Dark Chocolate Truffles

- 1/3 cup heavy whipping cream
- 6 Tbsp unsalted butter, cut into small pieces
- 2 cups Ghirardelli 60% Cocoa Bittersweet Chocolate Chips or two 4 oz Ghirardelli 60% Cocoa Bittersweet Chocolate Baking bars
- Coating: 1/3 cup Ghirardelli Unsweetened Cocoa or 3/4 cup chopped almonds or pecans

Bring the cream to a simmer in a small saucepan. Add butter and stir until melted. Add Ghirardelli chocolate. Stir until completely melted and smooth. Dip finger into melted chocolate to test the deeper, darker taste of our new, higher cocoa content chocolate. Remove from heat and pour the chocolate mixture into a shallow bowl. Cool, cover and hide in refrigerator until firm, at least two hours. Roll mixture into 1" balls and then roll each ball in Ghirardelli Unsweetened Cocoa, chopped almonds or pecans. Serve.



GHIRARDELLI MOMENTS OF TIMELESS PLEASURE™

Most recipes call for only the white and light green portions of a leek. What can I do with the leftover dark green tops?

—Rachel Oberlin, Hoboken, New Jersey

A Tasha DeSerio responds: Unfortunately, there aren't that many uses in the kitchen for the leek's flat, broad, dark green tops, which tend to be tough and fibrous. Leeks are grown for their white root ends. Farmers mound soil around the stalks as leeks grow to protect them from the sunlight in order to achieve this desired whiteness, which, along with the pale green portion of the stalk, has a sweet, delicate flavor and tender texture. While the dark green leaves don't have the same refined flavor as the pale portion of the plant, you can use them to flavor soups, stocks, or braising liquids (they're especially nice with fish or poultry stocks). Tie up herbs in the wide leaves to make a bouquet garni, or, if you'll be straining the liquid at the end, roughly chop them and add them directly to the pot.

Tasha DeSerio owns Olive Green Catering in Berkeley, California.

Why is the price of vanilla so exorbitant? Will it ever drop?

—Meg Shito, via email

A Matt Nielsen responds: The past four years have been extremely tumultuous times for the vanilla industry. With the supply of vanilla beans in severe shortage due to disastrous weather and political instability, retail prices for vanilla have more than tripled, reaching an all-time high in 2004, when a single bean cost about \$8 and an ounce of pure vanilla extract cost \$5. Historically, vanilla is the second most expensive spice in the world because it's so labor intensive to produce, requiring hand pollination, hand picking, and curing that lasts for 12 to 16 months. The recent supply shortage only exacerbated the situation.

The good news is that the price of vanilla beans is dropping significantly this year due to increased production and new growing regions. The majority of the world's vanilla is grown in Madagascar, off the east coast of Africa, but it's also grown in Indonesia, Mexico, and

Tahiti. The newer growing regions are Uganda, India, and Papua New Guinea. We now have more vanilla beans available than there is demand, and you can expect to see prices drop to about \$4.25 per bean and \$2.50 per ounce of extract.

Matt Nielsen is the COO of Nielsen-Massey Vanillas Inc. of Waukegan, Illinois, a family business that has been producing vanilla since 1907.

Many cake recipes call for beating eggs into the batter one at a time. What would happen if I didn't?

—Sandy Putnam, Sebago, Maine

A Abigail Johnson Dodge responds: The reason to add eggs slowly or one at a time is that it helps keep the batter emulsified, which is important for the cake's final texture. If you add all the eggs at once, the batter could break and look curdled. This could cause it to lose volume (that is, air pockets would collapse), and the baked cake would not be as light. That's the theory, anyway. In

reality, most folks will neither see nor taste the difference between a cake baked from a broken batter or an emulsified one, although side-by-side comparisons would show a difference. I still recommend adding eggs one by one to encourage proper technique and best results.

Abigail Johnson Dodge, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of The Weekend Baker.

Are wine decanters best used for certain kinds of wines?

—Terrence Kellogg, via email

A Tim Gaiser responds: Decanting, or pouring wine from the bottle into a glass decanter or simple glass carafe, serves different purposes for different wines, but the ultimate goal is to make the wine more pleasing. With young red wines, decanting aerates them, which makes them softer and more enjoyable sooner after opening. You might decant white or red wine to bring up its temperature. A bottle of white wine that has been overly chilled or a bottle of red that has just come from the cellar are both cooler than optimum drinking temperature and will display a fraction of their aromas and flavors.

Finally, decanting is absolutely necessary for an older bottle of red wine to separate out the sediment. To do this, first be sure the bottle has been resting, undisturbed, in an upright position for at least 12 hours. Open the bottle carefully so as to not disturb the sediment. Holding the bottle over a candle or a flashlight, pour the wine slowly and gently into the decanter in one uninterrupted motion. As you pour the wine into the decanter, watch for sediment. As soon as you see the fine sediment reach the shoulder (not the neck) of the bottle, stop pouring.

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier. ♦

Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, Fine Cooking, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by email to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.



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Beyond Champagne

Delightful bubbly wines that are off the beaten path

BY TIM GAISER



The holidays are here, peak season for sparkling wine and the perfect time to discover the world of bubbly beyond Champagne. (By law, only the sparkling wines made in the Champagne region of France can be called Champagne.) It's a bigger world than you might have thought. From New Mexico to Australia, sparkling wine is made all over the globe, in a range of appealing styles and from numerous different grape varieties. Many of these non-Champagne sparklers are outstanding values and easy to find. And, more to the point, they're deliciously versatile, as good for apéritifs as they are with hors d'oeuvres or a sit-down meal. Here's a guide to some of the more delightful—and unusual—sparkling wines.

Crisp, refreshing dry sparkling wines

There's a lot to choose from when it comes to dry sparkling wines, and all of them cost less than a bottle of Champagne. The following wines are dry in style and excellent served as an apéritif or paired with lighter seafood and shellfish appetizers.

Cremant d'Alsace hails from the warm sunny region east of the Vosges Mountains in eastern France. The wines are based on the Pinot Blanc grape with lesser amounts of Chardonnay and Pinot Gris. Look for nonvintage wines from Charles Baur (\$16) or Pierre Sparr (\$16). Their crisp green apple, citrus, and toast flavors make them quintessential apéritif wines.

Blanquette de Limoux, also from France, is one of the world's great bubbly secrets. The sparkling wines of Blanquette actually predate Champagne by almost 200 years. The wines are made in and around the town of Limoux from the local Mauzac grape. Try the 2002 Cuvée Jean Philippe (\$12) or the 2000 Saint Hilaire Brut (\$14). Both are easy drinking and offer vibrant pear-peach flavors.

Cava is one of the world's most versatile sparkling wines and a good value. It's produced in several parts of Spain from the Paralleda, Macabeo, and Xarello grapes. Try the nonvintage Segura Viudas Aria Estate Brut (\$10) or the 2000 Marques de Gelida Cava Brut Exclusive Reserva (\$13). Both are crisp and refreshing.

How to safely open a bottle of bubbly

Grand Prix auto racers may do it all the time, but don't try popping a cork at home. Not only is it a waste of wine, but a flying cork could really hurt someone. Here's the safe way to do it:



Cut the foil below the wire cage and remove the foil. Place a cloth napkin over the top of the bottle and press on the cork (in case it's ready to pop on its own) as you loosen—but don't remove—the wire cage.



Lean the bottle against your hip at a 45-degree angle. Grip the cork while you gently turn the bottle (not the cork) and allow the cork to come out slowly.

For a hint of sweetness, try off-dry sparkling wines

Not all sparkling wines are dry. In fact, quite a few have a pleasing touch of sweetness, and the combination of residual sugar and crisp balancing acidity makes these off-dry wines incredibly food-friendly.

Moscato d'Asti is a gently sparkling, off-dry wine made from the Muscat grape in the Piedmont region of Northwest Italy. Moscato d'Asti is low in alcohol (just 5.5%), and offers spicy peach and strawberry flavors that make it a wonderful apéritif and a perfect match with spicy-hot Asian starters. It's also delicious served with fresh fruit desserts. Look for the 2004 Michele Chiarlo Nivole (\$14) or the 2004 Bruno Ceretto (\$16).

Sparkling White Zinfandel is another off-dry bubbly that's just starting to gain popularity. The juicy strawberry-cherry fruit and vibrant citrus notes make these wines immediately appealing and easy to sip. Try the nonvintage Beringer Sparkling White Zinfandel (\$10).

Red bubbly is deliciously different

Believe it or not, there are actually sparkling red wines, and they're worth seeking out. Australians have been making **sparkling Shiraz** (Syrah) for decades, and the combination of ripe black fruits, crisp acidity, and bubbles is irresistible. Try the nonvintage Seaview (\$9) or the nonvintage Hardys (\$20). Both make delightful apéritifs and also do well served with homey meat dishes like burgers and meatloaf. Be sure to serve this wine—and all sparkling wines—chilled in Champagne flutes, which have a shape that helps preserve the bubbles longer.

*A contributing editor to Fine Cooking,
Tim Gaiser is a mastersommelier. ♦*



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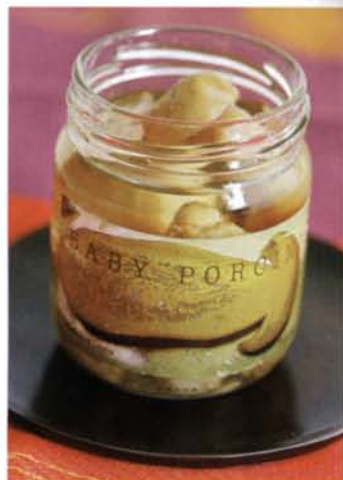
Picks for the Pantry

These specialty staples can add a quick boost to your cooking (and they make great stocking stuffers, too)

BY REBECCA FREEDMAN

Fancy pink salt for a finishing touch

Instead of everyday table salt, sprinkle this Murray River pink flake salt on any finished dish. Its pale, delicate crystals are certainly pretty, but what we love most is its unusual, feathery texture and pleasant crunch. *Murray River pink flake salt*, \$5.25 for a 2-ounce bag at Seasalt.com (425-885-7258).



Stash these mushrooms in your cupboard

If you've enjoyed the flavor of dried porcini but always wondered about fresh ones, this flavorful jarred version comes close, and they're easy to get by mail. Drain and add them to an antipasto dish, or slice them as a topping for pizza. *Baby porcini mushrooms*, \$7.50 per jar at Ta-Ze.com (877-244-8293).



Vinegar that's intriguingly sweet

Imagine the tanginess of vinegar combined with the caramelly, sweet complexity of dessert wine, and that's what this wine vinegar delivers—add a splash to a pan sauce for pork or duck.

Acetoria dessert wine vinegar, \$29.99 at Chefshop.com (877-337-2491).



Dried tomatoes without the oily hassle

These semi-dried tomatoes have a soft, pillowy texture, so they're easy to bite into (unlike many brands of sun-dried tomatoes). They're perfect for slipping into sandwiches or chopping up for salads or omelets. An added benefit: Unlike oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, these come in a plastic pouch and don't need to be drained, which saves you a step during cooking. *Semi-dried tomatoes*, \$7 for a 3.57-ounce package, at Oliviersandco.com (877-828-6620).



A top-notch oil for gift-giving

From a small estate near the Tuscan town of Pisa, Vicopisano extra virgin olive oil has a sweetly grassy aroma and silky texture, with flavor notes of sweet vanilla and crisp pear and a light, peppery kick that lingers. We think it's especially delicious drizzled over sautéed fish or roasted vegetables; it also makes a great gift. *Vicopisano extra-virgin olive oil*, \$23.99 for a 8.45-ounce bottle at Gustiamo.com (877-907-2525). ♦

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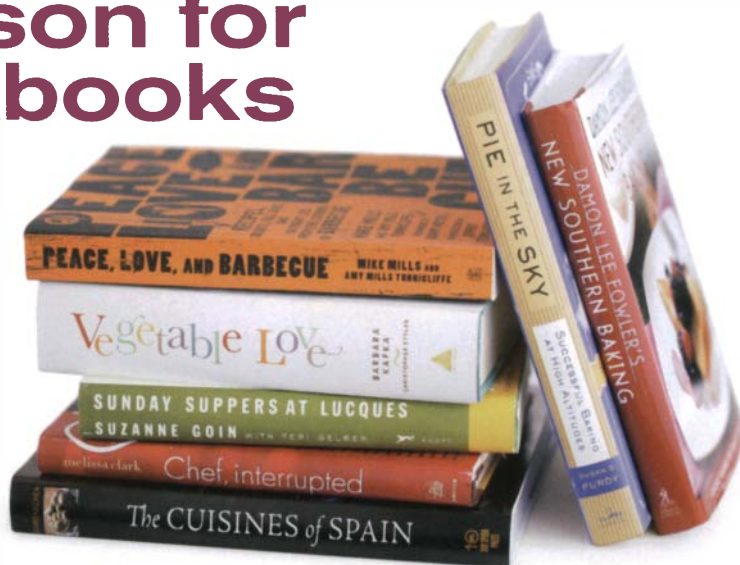


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'Tis the season for (more) cookbooks

Just when you thought there wasn't room in the bookcase for another cookbook, along comes a bumper crop of tempting new titles. What's a book-crazy cook to do? Write up a wish list and get another bookshelf, we say.



Dig in, deeply

Cooks who want to explore a single topic in depth are in luck this season with three new offerings on very different topics. Whether you're hankering for ribs and pit beans or just a good read, you'll come away from *Peace, Love, and Barbecue* (Rodale, \$19.95), by Mike Mills and Amy Mills Tunnicliffe, satisfied. This book is a wild romp through the fascinating world of American barbecue: pigs, pitmasters, secret sauces, and all. Meet the pros; peek into the best little shrines, shacks, and joints; and listen in on tales as juicy as a hog on a spit.

If you can't actually sneak into home kitchens across Spain to see what's on the stove, Teresa Barrenechea's new cookbook, *The Cuisines of Spain* (Ten Speed Press, \$40), is the next best thing. Barrenechea presents some 250 authentic but approachable recipes for regional specialties, so you can enjoy classics like Tortilla Española (potato and onion omelet) and Sopa de Ajo (bread and garlic soup) at your very own table.

We could go on and on about Barbara Kafka's magnificent new cookbook, *Vegetable Love*

(Artisan, \$35), but let's cut to the chase: You need this book. It has 750 tempting recipes for everything from Avocado Salad to Zucchini Pickles, plus all the information you could ever want about every vegetable you're likely to meet.

Cook like a chef

For the serious home cook, there's nothing like pulling off a restaurant-quality meal at home, and here are two books to get you started. Relaxed fixed-price Sunday suppers are a beloved tradition at Suzanne Goin's L.A. restaurant Lucques. And

Sunday Suppers at Lucques (Knopf, \$35) features 32 of Goin's Sunday menus, organized by season. The recipes require some patience and planning, but they're easy to follow.

In *Chef, Interrupted* (Clarkson Potter, \$32.50), Melissa Clark takes the signature dishes of the country's best chefs and translates them into recipes that any dedicated home cook can make. Time and again—in dishes like Tom Colicchio's Mushroom Tarte Tatin and Michelle Bernstein's Crispy Soft-Shell Crab with Pickled Watermelon, Arugula & Feta

Salad—Clark preserves ingenious elements and jettisons unnecessary flourishes. What you get is food so exquisite you'll have trouble believing you made it yourself.

Sweet treats

Anyone who's curious about the science of baking, loves adventure stories, or lives at a high elevation will jump for joy when they get their hands on a copy of *Pie in the Sky: Successful Baking at High Altitudes* (William Morrow, \$29.95), by Susan G. Purdy. With intelligence and humor, Purdy debunks high-altitude-baking myths and, instead, delivers precise charts for adjusting ingredients and tasty recipes that work at any altitude.

Damon Lee Fowler's *New Southern Baking* (Simon & Schuster, \$26) celebrates Southern home baking with a sprinkling of personal reminiscences, a heaping spoonful of historical perspective, and a charming collection of 150 recipes, from feathery biscuits to a litany of loaves, cobblers, pies, and cakes.

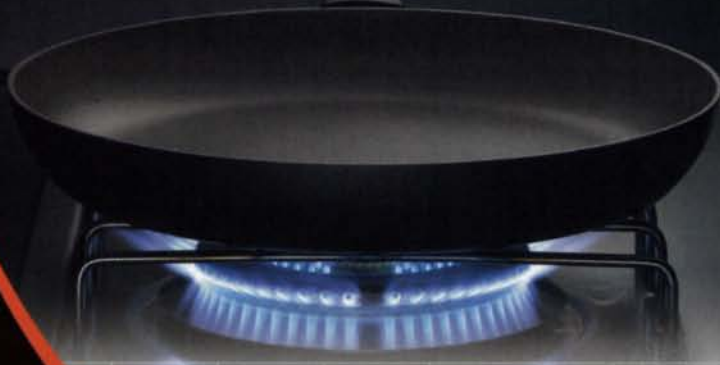
Kimberly Y. Masibay is an associate editor for *Fine Cooking*. ♦

From the *Fine Cooking* family

Like the innovative food at his Manhattan restaurants, L'Impero and Alto, the recipes in *Scott Conant's New Italian Cooking* (Broadway Books, \$35), co-written with former *Fine Cooking* editor Joanne Smart, are inspired by Italian ingredients and traditions and distinguished by Conant's beguiling touch. You'll find plenty of recipes that cook in 45 minutes or less (Pancetta-Wrapped Chicken Legs, for example), but you'll also find ideas for dinner parties and for when you want to make something different but undeniably delicious.

The lighthearted style of *Perfect Recipes for Having People Over* (Houghton Mifflin, \$35), by *Fine Cooking* contributing editor Pam Anderson, should put any nervous host at ease. With the queen of perfect recipes walking you through the process, throwing a dinner party is easy and worry-free. And the foolproof recipes are so tasty that people will think you cooked all day—even though you haven't.

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BY KIMBERLY Y. MASIBAY

what's new



does it work?

Slicing pineapple just got easy

When I first saw the Vacu Vin Easy Slicer Pineapple Corer, it wasn't love at first sight. But, I took the gadget home to give it a fair chance, and that's when it wowed me. In one quick action, it cored and sliced a pineapple, leaving the shell intact for use as a big piña colada cup. The Easy Slicer works like a corkscrew. Center the serrated edge atop the fruit (cut the crown off first), and press and twist the slicer into the pineapple until you reach the bottom. Then slowly pull the handle to remove a cylinder of perfectly sliced pineapple. The Easy Slicer only let me down once—when I used it on a super-soft, ripe pineapple, it shredded the fruit. Other than that, this little gadget definitely works. It sells for \$8.99 at Kitchenkapers.com.



Emile Henry's 5.5-liter round ceramic Dutch oven sells for \$157 at KitchenDirect.com.

Flameproof ceramic takes the heat

We wouldn't think of using most ceramic cookware on the stove, but this Dutch oven from Emile Henry's Flame Top line is a different story. Made from a durable new ceramic material, it can sit on a hot gas or electric burner without cracking. And unlike cast-iron Dutch ovens, this pot can go in the microwave and dishwasher.

The glaze is supposedly extremely resistant to chipping and scratching, and while our pot still looks great after a couple of months' use, we haven't had it long enough to fully assess its durability. Flame Top pots come in black and red and range from about \$70 for a 1.8-liter round pot to \$170 for a 6-liter oval.

news flash

Powder steel, the cutting edge in knives

The latest buzz in the knife industry is a new blade material that's supposed to stay sharp several times longer than the high-carbon stainless-steel alloys used in most high-quality knives. Two major manufacturers, Henckels and Kershaw Shun, have just come out with lines of knives that use this metal, known as powder steel. Powder steel is molten

steel that's reduced to fine particles and then compacted under high pressure. The resulting cutting edge is incredibly hard and smooth, a combination that helps the edge stay sharp. Henckels' Twin Cermex line of knives is widely available, and the Kershaw Shun Elite line is sold exclusively through Sur La Table stores.

—Maryellen Driscoll, editor at large

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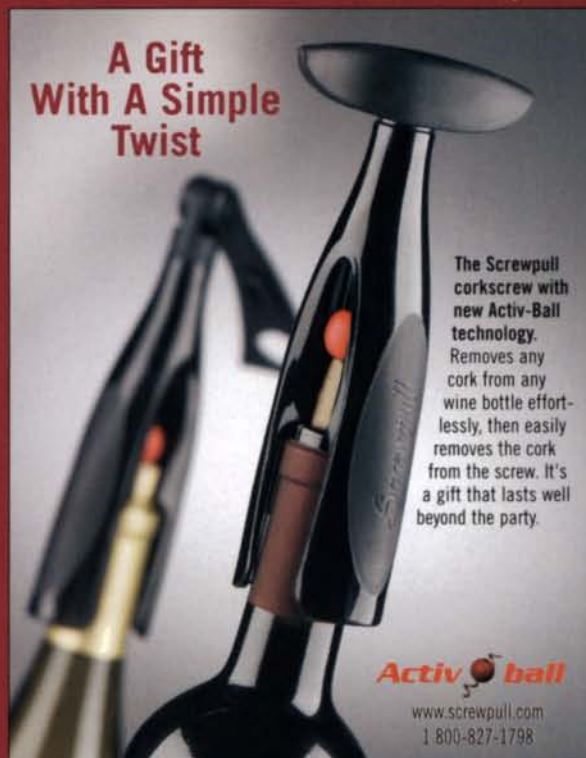


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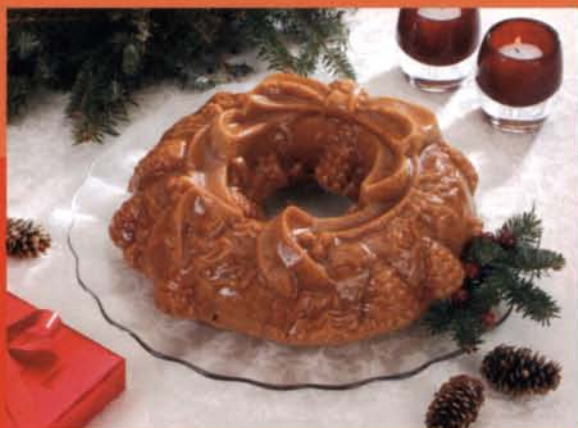
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It's all in the drawer

Appliances that traditionally open with doors are now showing up as drawers

The next generation of kitchen drawers doesn't merely help you organize your cooking supplies—these drawers actually work for you: microwaving food, chilling it, keeping it warm, even washing the dishes. For manufacturers, see p. 78.



Dishwasher drawers

Anyone who's ever run a not-quite-full dishwasher and felt guilty about wasting water and energy will appreciate these new double-drawer dishwashers. In the space of a standard 24-inch wide dishwasher, you get two independently functioning dishwasher drawers. Use just one for small loads; for large loads, use both. Some manufacturers offer single drawer units, which can be installed creatively around the kitchen and are ideal for small households. Single drawer units start at about \$740 and double units at \$1,260.



Refrigerator & freezer drawers

No doubt, these are the coolest drawers in the kitchen. They can go virtually anywhere, so you can store fresh ingredients wherever it's most convenient for you. Manufacturers offer a variety of finishes, including models that accept custom cabinetry panels for a fully integrated look. Prices start in the \$2,000 range.

Microwave drawers

At last, a truly clever answer to the decades-old question: Where to put the microwave? Sharp's new Insight Pro Microwave Drawer—the first of its kind—installs neatly into any 30-inch-wide space beneath a counter or cooktop, placing the microwave at a convenient height and creating a sleek, integrated look. The drawer is large enough to hold a 9x13-inch baking dish and slides open with the touch of a button. When it's time to stir or turn the food, just open the drawer and reach in—no need to remove a dish from the oven. Available in black, white, or stainless-steel finish for about \$850.

Warming drawers

The hardest part about cooking a big meal is keeping everything warm until serving time. A warming drawer solves this problem more effectively than an oven on low heat or a microwave. Designed to keep food warm without cooking it further, warming drawers have precise temperature and humidity controls to ensure that moist foods stay moist, and crisp foods stay crisp. Stand-alone drawers range from about 24 to 30 inches wide and can be placed wherever you like. They don't come cheap—expect to spend anywhere from \$600 to more than \$1,000—but they're a boon if you love to entertain or if your family rarely eats supper at the same time.

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Black Raspberry Lemon Pudding Pie



1 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon Curd
1 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Black Raspberry Preserves
Graham Cracker Pie Crust, prepared
2 small boxes Instant Vanilla Pudding Mix
1 3/4 c. Milk
1 8-oz. container Whipped Topping

In a large bowl, mix milk and pudding. Beat with a wire whisk till smooth. Stir Curd into pudding, then fold in whipped topping. Pour mixture into pie crust. Chill until set. Soften Preserves with a spoon, then spread on top of pie. Chill. Makes 6-8 servings. *Our Lime Curd would also be great in this recipe!*



Apple-Chipotle Shrimp



1 jar Dickinson's[®] Apple Butter
2 Tbsp. Dickinson's[®] Lime or Lemon Curd
1 Tbsp. Balsamic Vinegar
1 Tbsp. Olive Oil
1 Tbsp. Chipotle Sauce
1 tsp. Garlic, minced
1 1/2 lbs. Peeled & Deveined Shrimp, Tuna or Swordfish

Place all of the ingredients except the seafood in a food processor. Process until marinade is smooth. Place seafood in a large freezer storage bag & marinate 1-2 hours, turning occasionally. Grill or broil seafood. Pour marinade into a small saucepan & cook 2-3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Remove, brush on seafood every 2-3 minutes while grilling/broiling. Discard marinade. Makes 6-8 servings.



Apple-Berry Salsa with Cinnamon Chips



1/2 jar Dickinson's[®] Apple Butter
1/2 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Seedless Pacific Mountain[®] Strawberry Preserves
Chips: 2-3 lg. Flour Tortillas, Water,
1 Tbsp. Sugar, 1/2 tsp. Cinnamon

Preheat oven to 400°F. Brush tortillas with water. Combine sugar and cinnamon; sprinkle over tortillas; cut each tortilla into 8 wedges. Place wedges on cookie sheet. Bake 5-7 minutes or until golden brown. Remove and cool. Combine Apple Butter, Preserves, fruits, orange zest and juice in bowl. Serve fruit salsa with cinnamon chips. Makes about 3 cups of salsa.

Salsa: 2 Granny Smith Apples, cored & chopped, 1 or 2 Kiwi, peeled & chopped,
1 Orange (Zest & Juice)



Citrus Coconut Trifle



1 jar Dickinson's[®] Lemon or Lime Curd
1 jar Dickinson's[®] Pure Marion Blackberry Preserves
1 small box Instant Coconut Cream Pudding Mix, prepared as directed
1 10-oz. Pound or Angel Food Cake
1 8-oz. container Whipped Topping

Fold Curd into prepared pudding. Cut cake horizontally & spread with Preserves, then cut cake into 1" cubes. In a trifle dish, layer cake, pudding & whipped topping, in that order. Garnish with optional lime peel or mint leaves. Makes 8-10 servings. Try substituting with your favorite flavor of Dickinson's Preserves.



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review:

For better cookies, start with a better cookie sheet

BY MARYELLEN DRISCOLL

If you've been baking cookies on inexpensive cookie sheets you grabbed at the supermarket, it's time to hold your butter for something better. After baking more than a holiday's worth of cookies on eight different brands of cookie sheets, we found that for just \$10 more than you spent at the grocery store, you can upgrade to a cookie sheet that's more roomy, bakes more evenly, and doesn't warp in a hot oven.

For this review, we limited our bake-off to standard metal cookie sheets (we'll look at nonstick and insulated pans in future issues). And by cookie sheet, we mean a pan with one or more flat edges. This makes it easy to slip a spatula under cookies near the pan's edges, and it also allows a sheet of parchment to slip on and off without bumping over a raised rim.

Every cookie sheet we tried was significantly better than the metal cookie sheet we bought at the supermarket for about \$4, which baked very unevenly and warped in a hot oven. But none of the cookie sheets produced evenly baked goods across the entire sheet every time. All but one of the pans gave us cookies that were less browned in the center of the pan, even if just slightly. With scones, we saw differences in browning that seemed more a function of our oven's hot spots than the particular cookie sheet. Some sheets, however, seemed to protect against these hot spots, while others did not.

For example, scones that were baked on the better pans didn't show signs of burning on the bottom, even in places where we know our ovens tend to run hot. To find out which pans performed best in our tests, turn to p. 34.

How we tested

We baked batches of chocolate-chip cookies, star-shaped Christmas butter cookies, and plain scones on eight cookie sheets, using the same oven for each task and using parchment only when the recipe specified. We used the conventional baking mode, not convection. We looked for even browning, minimal sticking, easy maneuverability, and appropriate baking time. We also checked for warping at high temperatures. In addition to the pans listed on p. 34, we also tested metal cookie sheets made by Kaiser, Emerilware, Ekco, and Vollrath.

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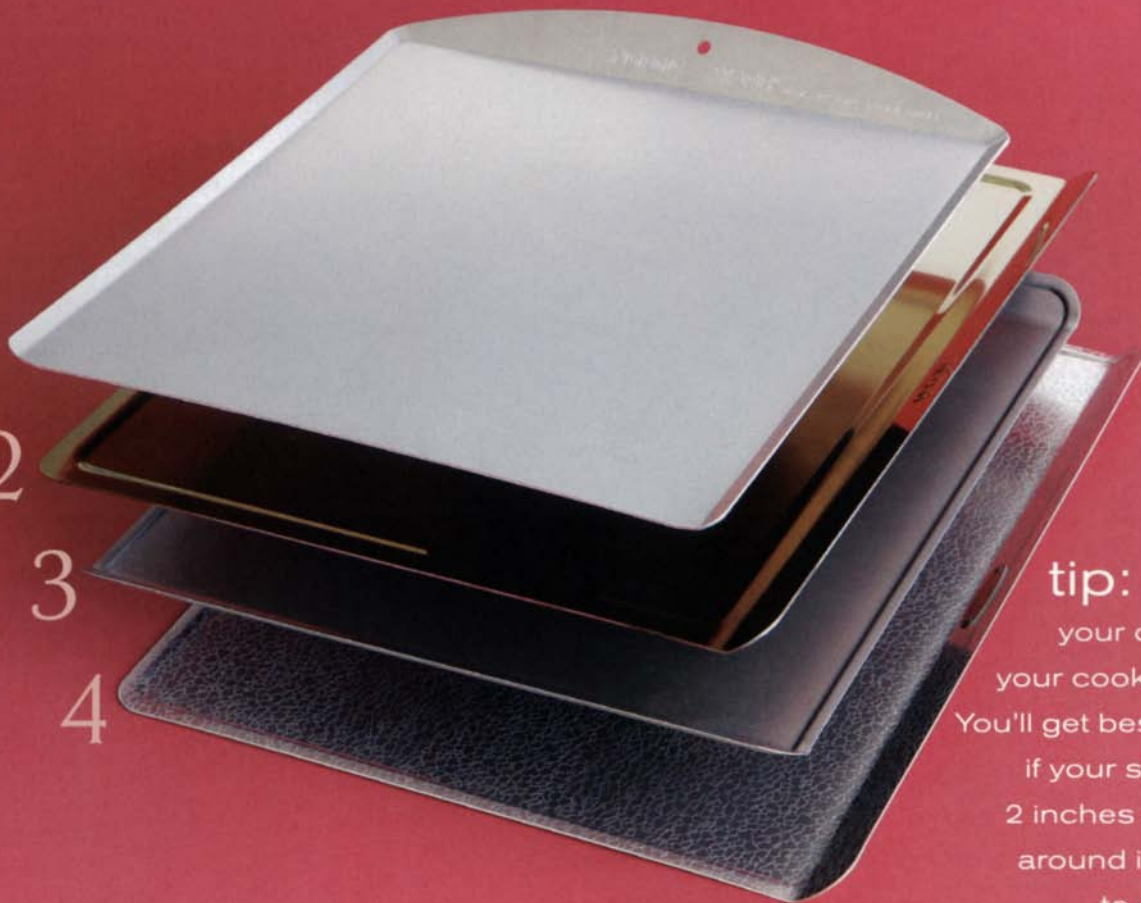
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1
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tip: Measure your oven and your cookie sheet. You'll get best results if your sheet has 2 inches of space around it for heat to circulate.

Step up to a better cookie sheet

1 **Best all-around**

NordicWare Natural Commercial Bakeware Cookie Sheet
\$13 at NordicWare.com
14x16 inches

This was the only sheet to evenly bake every cookie across the entire sheet. It has two slightly raised edges, which help to keep slippery parchment in place, and a third more pronounced and thus easy-to-grasp raised edge. Unfortunately, the length of this aluminum pan is on the shorter side (14¼ inches when you subtract the raised rim), so we could only comfortably fit three rows of chocolate-chip cookies, versus four on the longer sheets.

2 **Extravagantly good**

All-Clad Gold Standard Cookie Sheet
\$90 at LascosasCooking.com
14x17½ inches

We liked this pan for its consistent and relatively even browning plus its easy release. Melted chocolate chips didn't stick quite as much as they did to other pans. This pan is so heavy, though, that you almost need both hands to lift it, and it only has one raised edge so it can be hard to get a secure grip. It's made of an aluminum core with a gold-colored stainless exterior—flashy and impressive, we admit, but at \$90, it should do cartwheels, too.

3 **Best release**

Chicago Metallic Commercial Cookie Sheet
\$14.95 at KitchenConservatory.com
13¾x15¾ inches

This aluminized steel pan released cookies easier than all of the other metal pans we tested. It didn't brown butter cookies and scones as evenly as the NordicWare though, and it lost rigidity when hot so that it warped slightly as we lifted it from the oven. Like the NordicWare, it's only 14 inches in length without the raised edges, so it doesn't fit as many cookies as we would have liked.

4 **So cool**

Doughmakers Grand Cookie Sheet
\$17.95 at KitchenShop.com
14x17½ inches

This aluminum pan cooled down more quickly than any of the others once it came out of the oven. This meant that cookies cooled faster, so they were less apt to fall apart when transferred to a rack. We could also handle the pan sooner for washing, or for loading up another batch of cookies. With this pan, you could notice where our ovens run hot, but not so much that any cookies were burnt. Just one raised edge makes it difficult to rotate the pan in the oven. ♦



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Winning tip

Keep cutting boards in place

I've always leaned my cutting boards against the wall, but they had a tendency to slide whenever I picked one up. At a yard sale, I found a letter sorter for 10 cents (you can also find inexpensive ones at office-supply stores). Each cutting board fits perfectly in a slot and it is no longer a struggle to grab one without creating an avalanche.

—Aimee Holcomb, via email

A prize for the best tip

We want your best tips—we'll pay for the ones we publish—and we'll give a prize to the cleverest tip in each issue. Write to Tips, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506 or email fc@taunton.com.

The prize for this issue's winner: A *LamsonSharp Silver 3-piece Granton-edge knife set*; value: \$263.



A sheet pan creates countertop space

I live in an apartment with no countertop next to the stove, which can be inconvenient. But I've solved the problem: I set an inverted half sheet pan over two burners, reaching front to back, upon which I can place whatever I need to have right nearby. Of course, this only works when I'm using one or two burners at a time.

—Alessia Bewsher, New York, New York

Wrap cork lids for easy pulling

I love the grainy French mustard that comes in big ceramic jars, but pulling out the cork lids of these jars can be tricky. I wrap the cork in plastic wrap and twist the ends. This makes it easy to pull and also keeps the cork clean.

—Eleanor Genuardi, Corona Del Mar, California

Clean an electric grinder with bread

In an ideal world, I'd have two grinders: one for coffee and the other

for spices. But I only have one, and I always had trouble cleaning it when switching from coffee beans to dried spices and vice versa. Now, I tear half a slice of stale white bread into a few pieces and grind it up in the mill. This removes most of the spice or coffee residue and minimizes the "contamination" of whatever I grind next.

—Dan Myers, Franklin, Michigan

Cool cake layers on stockpot pasta inserts

If you bake a lot of layer cakes and you don't have enough cooling racks, you'll find this tip helpful. I invert the pasta inserts from two stockpots and rest the cake layers on top. The colander-type holes allow for air circulation, and the sturdy metal keeps the layers from sagging.

—Christin Ellingsworth, via email

Keep stock of your frozen stockpile

Keeping a simple freezer inventory list on the side of my fridge has helped me prepare meals and grocery lists much more efficiently. I keep the

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inventory current by adding or crossing out items as soon as I put them in or take them out. This way, I can quickly assess what I have on hand, avoid over-buying, and spare my fingers the bone-chilling task of sorting through frozen food.

—Sarah Hartland,
Towson, Maryland

use a little, freeze the rest

Freeze unused bacon

When a recipe calls for a slice or two of bacon and I have no immediate use for the rest of the package, I roll each slice of bacon up in a spiral and place the rolls on a baking sheet in the freezer. Once they're frozen enough to not stick to one another (two to three hours), I put them in a zip-top bag for future use. The spiral shape makes them compact and easy to grab.

—Annette Pedroza, via email

...and chipotles in adobo

Most recipes call for one or two chipotles, but the can contains fifteen or more. I put one chile and a little sauce in each compartment of an ice-cube tray. I let them freeze and then transfer the cubes to a freezer bag. Now I have a supply of individually frozen chipotles to grab whenever a recipe calls for them. Be sure to wash the ice-cube tray well after removing the chiles.

—Terra Ogle,
Fayetteville, Arizona



A mug doubles as a sharpening steel

The unglazed bottom rim of a ceramic or porcelain mug is an ideal surface for honing the edge of your kitchen knives. Use it as you would a knife-honing steel. Hold the knife perpendicular to the rim's surface and then re-angle the blade so it's at a 45-degree angle (half of the previous 90-degree angle). Re-angle it again to half of the 45-degree angle and start sharpening.

—Todd Clattenburg,
Carleton Place, Ontario

A neat way to measure sticky items

I have an alternate way to measure sticky items like honey and molasses than the one in *Fine Cooking* #75, p. 80. To speed your cleaning time and ensure that you'll use every last drop, line your measuring cup or spoon with plastic wrap, making sure that you have a bit of overhang. Pour the amount you need, gather up the excess plastic wrap, and twist tight. You should have a bundle ready for use. Simply poke a small whole in the plastic with a paring knife and squeeze the ingredient out with your fingers.

—Kim Le, via email

Keep homemade cookies soft for days

To preserve the softness of freshly baked cookies and brownies, I put a slice of bread in the storage container. The moisture from the bread keeps the cookies soft and makes them taste fresh

from the oven—even after several days. When the bread becomes dry, just toss it and replace it with another slice.

—Anne Park, Blacklick, Ohio

Use a wire rack to drain lasagna noodles

When you drain cooked lasagna noodles in a colander, they can tangle or break easily. To avoid this, I carefully pull out individual noodles as soon as they become al dente and drain them on a wire rack set over a rimmed baking sheet to collect any excess water. With this method, I have found that noodles cool quickly and are easier to work with.

—Steven Fields, San Francisco, California



Easy squeeze

When using the convenience of tubed tomato paste (or anchovy paste), I use a toothpaste "squeezer." This makes the job of squeezing the tube easier and it ensures that every last bit of paste is used. I prefer the kind that you slide along the tube as opposed to the one that rolls up with the tube.

—Sarah Selis, San Diego, California

To measure salt easily, get rid of the box

Measuring salt out of its original container can be difficult and messy. I keep salt on the countertop in covered sugar bowls. One contains sea salt and the other kosher salt. Whether I need a pinch or a teaspoon, I always get the correct amount with no waste. The salt also stays dry so it doesn't clump.

—Elaine Hanna Johnson,
Richardson, Texas ♦

Winner:

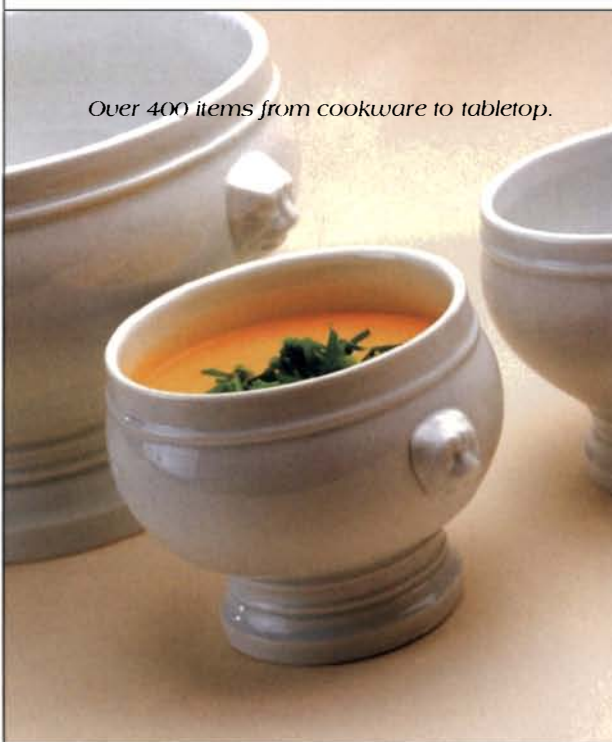
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Roasts. with the Most

Crisp, savory
crusts make
classic roasts
extra special

BY GORDON HAMERSLEY

Crusted roasts are one my favorite things to serve when I'm entertaining at home. They're ideal because they're always impressive—the crunchy coating gives every bite an extra burst of flavor—yet they really don't ask all that much of the cook. Once you've patted on the crust (for tips on this, see the sidebar on p. 43) and put the roast into the oven, it's pretty much hands-off from there. You're free to work on the rest of your menu or to kick up your heels and relax with an *apéritif*. The way I see it, why serve the same old roast when a crusted roast is just as easy and that much tastier?

The version I turn to most often is the classic breadcrumb, garlic, and herb crust. I use it on the sirloin roast on p. 42, but this versatile crust isn't just for beef; it works equally well with lamb, pork, or veal.

I also enjoy coming up with crusts that are matched to the cut of meat I'm using. For example, the rack of veal on p. 45 gets a crust of breadcrumbs, capers, onions, tarragon, Parmesan, and lemon—a riff on the flavors of the classic Italian dish *veal piccata*. And for the rack of pork at right, I created a different kind of crust. It's a flavorful paste of dried cranberries, walnuts, port, balsamic vinegar, and spices. Its color is dark, but the flavor is big and bright.

With crusted roasts, you don't really get the flavorful drippings you need for quick pan sauces—the bits of crust that fall into the roasting pan tend to burn. But you won't miss them once you've tasted the simple sauce recipes I've provided. A bite of crusted roast is a beautiful thing, and it's even more so when you dip it into a tasty little sauce.





Roast Rack of Pork with a Cranberry-Walnut Crust and Sauce

Serves eight.

When you go to buy a rack of pork, be sure to ask the butcher to remove the chine bone so you can easily carve the rack into chops.

1 8-bone pork rack (about 5 pounds), chine bone removed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium onion, roughly chopped (about 2 cups)
1 cup ruby port
½ cup plus 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
¾ cup dried cranberries (about 4 ounces)
¾ teaspoon dried red chile flakes
Pinch ground allspice
1½ cups walnuts (6 ounces), toasted and chopped medium-coarse
2 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
3 cups homemade or low-salt chicken or beef broth

Let the roast sit at room temperature for 30 minutes. Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Put a roasting rack in a roasting pan or in a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. (Line the pan with foil for easier cleanup, if you like.)

Season the pork liberally with salt and pepper on all sides. Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, sear the rack of pork until browned on all sides, including the ends, 2 to 3 minutes per side. Transfer the meat to the roasting pan, meaty side up. Set aside to cool while you prepare the crust.

Pour off all the fat in the sauté pan, return the pan to medium-high heat, and add the butter. When it stops bubbling, add the onion and reduce the heat to medium low. Cook the onion, stirring occasionally, until soft and medium brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Add the port, ½ cup of the balsamic vinegar, the dried cranberries, chile flakes, and allspice. Raise the heat to medium high and boil until the liquid has almost completely evaporated, about another 10 minutes.

Transfer the cranberry mixture to a food processor and pulse 12 to 15 times to create a slightly chunky paste. Scrape it into a small bowl and fold in the walnuts and parsley. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Reserve 3 tablespoons of the cranberry mixture in a dish to make a sauce later. Pat the remaining cranberry mixture onto the top and sides of the pork rack.

Roast the pork for 30 minutes and then tent a sheet of aluminum foil over the roast for the remaining cooking time to keep the crust from overbrowning. Continue to roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat reads 140°F, about another 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat, bring the chicken or beef broth to a boil. Add the remaining 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar and boil until the mixture is reduced by half, about 10 minutes. Lower the heat to medium and whisk in the reserved cranberry-walnut crust paste. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Let the meat rest for 10 minutes (it will continue to cook as it rests) before carving into chops and serving with the sauce.

TO DRINK:

A full-bodied, spicy Shiraz from Australia is a good choice to match the rich flavors of the port, as well as the tannins of the walnuts, in the crust and sauce.

For a complementary sauce, reserve some of the cranberry-walnut crust mixture and whisk into simmering broth just before serving.

Roast Beef with a Classic Breadcrumb, Garlic & Herb Crust

Serves eight to ten.

1 5-pound boneless strip loin roast or 5- to 6-pound boneless top sirloin roast with the cap removed (see sidebar at far right); trimmed if necessary and patted dry
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs, preferably from a baguette or other firm white bread
4 cloves garlic, minced
2 medium shallots, minced
1 tablespoon roughly chopped fresh thyme
1 tablespoon roughly chopped fresh marjoram
3 tablespoons melted unsalted butter
1/3 cup Dijon mustard
Creamy Horseradish-Mustard Sauce, for serving (see the recipe below right)

Let the roast sit at room temperature for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Put a roasting rack in a roasting pan or a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. (Line the pan with foil for easier clean-up, if you like.)

Season the roast liberally with salt and pepper on all sides. Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat the oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, brown the meat well on all sides, including the ends, about 4 minutes per side. Transfer the meat to the roasting pan. Set aside to cool while you prepare the crust.

In a medium bowl, combine the breadcrumbs, garlic, shallots, thyme, marjoram, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper. Pour the melted butter into the breadcrumb mixture; toss to combine. Using a rubber spatula, smear the top and sides of the beef with the mustard. With your hands, lightly press the breadcrumb mixture into the mustard.

Roast the beef until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat reads 125°F for medium rare, about 60 minutes for a strip loin roast or 60 to 80 minutes for a top sirloin roast, depending on its thickness. (To keep the crust from overbrowning, start checking on the roast after 30 minutes of cooking, and when the crust is golden brown, tent it with aluminum foil.)

Meanwhile, make the horseradish-mustard sauce at right.

Remove the roast from the oven and let the meat rest for 10 to 20 minutes (the meat will continue to cook as it rests) before carving, across the grain, into 1/2-inch-thick slices.

TO DRINK: The deep berry flavors and robust tannins of a Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet-Merlot blend from California or Australia will pair beautifully with this roast.



Creamy Horseradish-Mustard Sauce

Yields 1 1/3 cups.

1 cup crème fraîche
3 tablespoons drained jarred horseradish
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
Pinch cayenne

In a small bowl, whisk all the ingredients. Let the sauce sit for 20 minutes for the flavors to meld before serving. The sauce can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for up to four days; stir before using.



This classic breadcrumb crust is rich and garlicky—delicious with beef or any kind of meat.

Tips for a successful crust



FIRST SEAR, THEN CRUST. Searing the roast before you apply the crust creates flavorful browning on the surface of the meat.

COAT THE MEAT WITH SOMETHING STICKY. A crust needs something to stick to: mustard, yogurt, mayonnaise, and roasted garlic purée all make great "glues." Or the crust itself can be a sticky paste, such as the cranberry-walnut crust on p. 41.

NOT TOO THICK, NOT TOO THIN. Apply the crust about ¼ to ½ inch thick, patting it on lightly with a little extra pressure as needed.

JUST THE TOP AND SIDES. You don't need to apply crust to the bottom of the roast, only the top and sides.

DON'T BE CRUST-FALLEN. No matter how careful you are, it's inevitable that some of the crust will fall off when you carve the roast. This goes with the territory, so don't sweat it. Just make sure everyone gets some of the crust on the plate with their portion of meat and everyone will be happy.

A roast by any other name (is still a roast)

Buying beef can be tricky because one cut of beef can go by several different names. Depending on which butcher you go to or where you live, a boneless strip loin roast could be called a top loin roast, or a boneless shell roast, a whole strip, or a whole New York strip. And a boneless top sirloin roast might also be called a top sirloin butt or a rump roast.

If you decide to buy a boneless top sirloin roast, make sure the butcher has removed the cap so that the roast is a better shape for carving. (You'll probably be charged for the cap and trimmings, though, so take them home and use them for stew meat.)

Buying a rack of veal

A rack of veal can be a special-order cut, so talk to your butcher up to a week in advance to be sure it's available. Ask the butcher to remove the chine bone, which is the backbone, from the rack so that you can cut between the ribs when you carve the cooked rack. Also tell the butcher you want the rack completely trimmed but not frenched (which involves stripping away all the fat, meat, and connective tissue from the tips of the rib bones). Veal weights can range widely; ask for a smaller rack if possible.

A crunchy crust with the piquant flavors of capers, lemon, tarragon, and mustard.





Roast Rack of Veal with a Lemon, Caper, and Tarragon Crust

Serves six.

I love rack of veal, but I save it for very special occasions because it's generally a special-order cut, and it isn't cheap.

1 6-rib trimmed (but not frenched) veal rack with the chine bone removed, 4 to 6 pounds after the chine is removed

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

¼ medium red onion, roughly chopped (to yield about ½ cup)

¼ cup capers, drained and rinsed

¼ cup fresh lemon juice

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

1 large egg

¾ cup coarse fresh breadcrumbs, preferably from a baguette or other firm white bread

⅓ cup roughly chopped fresh tarragon

¼ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano (grated on the small holes of a box grater or on a rasp grater)

2 scallions (white and green parts), thinly sliced (about ½ cup)

Finely grated zest of 1 medium lemon

Rémoulade, for serving (see the recipe at right)

Let the roast sit at room temperature for 30 minutes. Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Put a roasting rack in a roasting pan or a heavy-duty rimmed baking sheet. (Line the pan with foil for easier clean-up, if you like.)

Season the veal liberally with salt and pepper on all sides. Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. When the pan is very hot, brown the meat on all sides, including the ends, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer the meat to the roasting rack, meaty side up. Set aside to cool while you prepare the crust.

Purée the red onion, capers, lemon juice, mustard, and egg in a food processor. The mixture will be fairly loose.

In a small bowl, stir the breadcrumbs, tarragon, Parmigiano, scallions, and lemon zest. When the veal is cool enough to touch, pour the onion purée over the meat, using a spatula to spread it evenly. Some of the mixture will spill off the roast and into the pan—that's fine. Pat the breadcrumb mixture into the onion purée on the top and sides of the rack of veal, pressing slightly to help the crust adhere.

Roast the veal until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thickest part of the meat reads 125° to 130°F for medium rare, 55 to 90 minutes, depending on the size of the rack. (To keep the crust from overbrowning, start checking on the roast after 30 minutes of cooking; when the crust is golden brown, tent it with a sheet of aluminum foil.)

Meanwhile, prepare the remoulade below.

Remove the veal from the oven and let rest for 10 minutes (it will continue to cook as it rests) before carving into single chops and serving with the remoulade. Don't fret if some of the crust falls off the meat when you carve.

TO DRINK:

Try a bright, intensely flavored Italian red, such as a Barbera or a Chianti Classico Riserva. Both will mirror the acidity in the lemon juice as well as the flavors of the fresh herbs.

Rémoulade

Yields about 1 cup.

If you're concerned about the uncooked egg yolk in this sauce, use a pasteurized egg.

1 large egg yolk, preferably pasteurized

1 tablespoon white-wine vinegar

1 tablespoon Dijon mustard

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup vegetable oil

1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh chives

1 teaspoon capers, drained, rinsed, and chopped

¼ teaspoon minced fresh tarragon

In a medium bowl, whisk the egg yolk, vinegar, mustard, 1 teaspoon salt, and several grinds of pepper until smooth. Very slowly whisk in the olive oil, followed by the vegetable oil. The mixture should be thick and emulsified like mayonnaise. Add the chives, capers, and tarragon. Season with more salt, pepper, and vinegar to taste. The remoulade can be stored, covered, in the refrigerator for up to two days.

*Gordon Hamersley is the chef-owner of Hamersley's Bistro in Boston, and the author of *Bistro Cooking at Home*. ♦*

Twice-Baked

*Cheese and
bacon variation*

MASTER RECIPE

Twice-Baked Potatoes with Crème Fraîche & Chives

Serves eight.

4 medium russet potatoes
(about 8 ounces each),
scrubbed
3½ tablespoons unsalted
butter, at room temperature
½ cup crème fraîche or sour
cream, at room temperature
¼ cup half-and-half, whole
milk, or buttermilk, warmed
¾ teaspoon kosher salt
Freshly ground white pepper
2 tablespoons snipped fresh
chives or finely chopped
scallions (both white and
green parts)

Bake, scoop, and mash:

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Set the potatoes directly

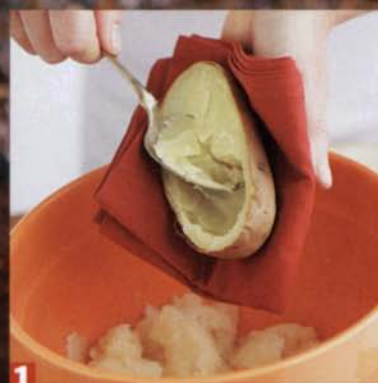
on the oven rack and bake until tender all the way through, 1 hour to 1 hour and 15 minutes. Transfer the potatoes to a work surface and let them cool for 10 to 15 minutes.

Examine each potato to see if there's a way to halve it to give you two shallow, wide halves rather than taller, narrower ones. With a large chef's knife, slice each potato in half lengthwise, cutting cleanly—not sawing—so as not to tear the skin. Using a dishtowel or oven mitt to protect your hand from the heat, hold a potato half in one hand and gently scoop out the flesh with a spoon, leaving the shells ¼ to ⅓ inch thick, **1**. Repeat with the remaining halves. Force all the flesh through a potato ricer or mash it with a potato masher; transfer it to a mixing bowl.

Season: With a wooden spoon, stir in 3 tablespoons of the butter, then the crème fraîche or sour cream, and finally the half-and-half or milk **2**. Season with the salt, pepper to taste, and the chives or scallions. Taste and adjust the seasonings.

Fill: Scoop the filling into the potato skins, compacting it lightly **3**. For a rough-textured surface, mark it with the tines of a fork. Top each with bits of the remaining ½ tablespoon butter.

Bake: Heat the oven to 400°F. Arrange the potatoes on a baking sheet or in a large baking dish. Bake until heated through and beginning to brown in spots on top, 25 to 30 minutes (or 35 to 40 minutes if made ahead and refrigerated). Let sit for about 10 minutes before serving.



1 Scoop out the flesh, leaving a thin layer in the shell so it doesn't fall apart.



2 Use a light hand when mixing in the filling ingredients so the potatoes remain light and fluffy.



3 Spoon the filling back into the shell, pressing just enough so it holds together.

Potatoes

the ultimate make-ahead holiday side dish

BY MOLLY STEVENS

A cinch to make, easy to assemble ahead of time, with individual portions just right for entertaining—what more could you ask for in a holiday side dish? Twice-baked potatoes have it all. And what's more, I love the way twice-baked potatoes deliver the fluffy texture of mashed potatoes combined with the satisfyingly chewy texture of baked potato skins.

The only choice of potato for twice-baked is a russet. Sometimes labeled simply as baking potatoes, the high-starch and low-moisture interior of these potatoes translates into a wonderfully fluffy mash that can absorb a generous amount of enrichment without becoming gummy or heavy. And their rugged, thick skin is an ideal shell to hold the filling.

The best tool for the fluffiest filling is a potato ricer. You can also use a potato masher, but the potatoes won't be quite as light (for ricer sources, see p. 78). Where the fun comes in is deciding on flavorings to create an appealing side dish that complements your menu. I always start with some sort of dairy, since without it, the potatoes will be dry. When I'm putting on the ritz, I combine butter, crème fraîche, and light cream, which creates a lovely texture and incomparable flavor worth every calorie, as you'll see in the master recipe at left.

I've included two of my most trusted flavor variations, but feel free to experiment with combinations of your own. Do keep in mind, though, that you'll be serving these as a side dish, so they shouldn't upstage the main course.

Cheese & Bacon Variation

Serves eight.

4 medium russet potatoes (about 8 ounces each), scrubbed
3½ tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream, at room temperature
¼ cup half-and-half, warmed
¾ cup shredded sharp Cheddar or Gruyère
¼ cup lightly packed finely grated Parmigiano Reggiano (about ¾ ounce)
5 slices bacon, cooked and crumbled
½ teaspoon kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
2 tablespoons snipped fresh chives or finely chopped scallions (both white and green parts; optional)

Bake, scoop, and mash the potatoes as directed in the master recipe. For the seasoning step, with a wooden spoon, stir 3 tablespoons of the butter, the crème fraîche, half-and-half, cheeses, bacon, salt, pepper to taste, and chives or scallions, if using, into the mashed potato flesh. Fill the potato halves, dotting with the remaining butter as directed in the master recipe, and bake as directed.

Porcini & White Truffle Variation

Serves eight.

¼ ounce dried porcini mushrooms (about ¼ cup)
4 medium russet potatoes (about 8 ounces each), scrubbed
3½ tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
½ cup crème fraîche or sour cream, at room temperature
¼ cup half-and-half, warmed
½ to 1 teaspoon white truffle oil
¾ teaspoon kosher salt
Freshly ground white pepper

Soak the mushrooms in 1 cup very hot water while you bake, scoop, and mash the potatoes as directed in the master recipe. Drain the mushrooms, saving the liquid for another use (such as a soup, stock, or sauce). Finely chop the mushrooms. For the seasoning step, with a wooden spoon, stir 3 tablespoons of the butter, the crème fraîche, half-and-half, chopped mushrooms, ½ teaspoon of the truffle oil, the salt, and pepper to taste into the mashed potato flesh. Taste and add more truffle oil, if you like. Stuff the potato halves, dotting with the remaining butter as directed in the master recipe, and bake as directed.

Making them ahead

A main virtue of twice-baked potatoes is that you can make them ahead and reheat to serve—a real boon for entertaining. Once you've filled the potatoes, transfer them to a baking dish, cover tightly

with plastic, and refrigerate for several hours or overnight. They can go directly from the refrigerator to the oven (obviously, remove the plastic wrap first). Once the potatoes are baked, they can sit for 10 to 15 minutes before serving.

—M. S.

Molly Stevens, a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*, is the co-author of *One Potato, Two Potato*. Her latest book is *All About Braising*. ♦



BY TASHA DESERIO

4 great ways to cook broccoli

We eat a lot of broccoli in my house. My two-year-old is obsessed with it, so needless to say, I try to keep it on hand. While my son prefers his broccoli boiled and combined with a quick sauté of tofu, garlic, and green onion (I'm not making this up), my husband and I like to branch out to other cooking methods, including slow-cooking, sautéing, and roasting. The method I choose depends on how much time I have and what flavor and texture I'm going for (see the methods below).

Many supermarkets sell broccoli crowns, but I prefer buying whole broccoli, stem

and all. As long as you peel the stems before cooking—the outer layer tends to be tough and fibrous—they're just as tasty as the florets. When buying broccoli, look for deep, green color and nice, tight flower heads, which means that the broccoli is fresh.

Don't make the mistake of cooking broccoli until it's limp and lifeless. Broccoli is done when it has lost its crunch but still has a bit of toothiness left; a sharp knife will pierce the stems easily. (Don't use a fork—by the time the tines pierce the stems, the broccoli will already be overcooked.) To be really sure if your broccoli is perfectly tender, try tasting a piece.

roasting is easiest of all,

and is my new favorite method. It has all the caramelly goodness of slow-cooked and sautéed broccoli, and the florets get nice and crisp. The technique couldn't be simpler: Slice the broccoli, toss it in olive oil, season it with salt, and pop it in a hot oven. In twenty minutes or less, it's ready. My lunchtime favorite is to finish it with a few drops of fresh lemon juice and grated Pecorino.

slow-cooking makes it silky.

This method is like a low-heat sauté; the broccoli cooks slowly in oil and becomes browned and deeply flavorful. Choose the largest skillet you have (the more surface area, the better), be sure to stir occasionally, and keep the heat low to prevent scorching. Before serving, give the dish a minute or two to cool; slow-cooked broccoli tastes better when it's not hot out of the pan.

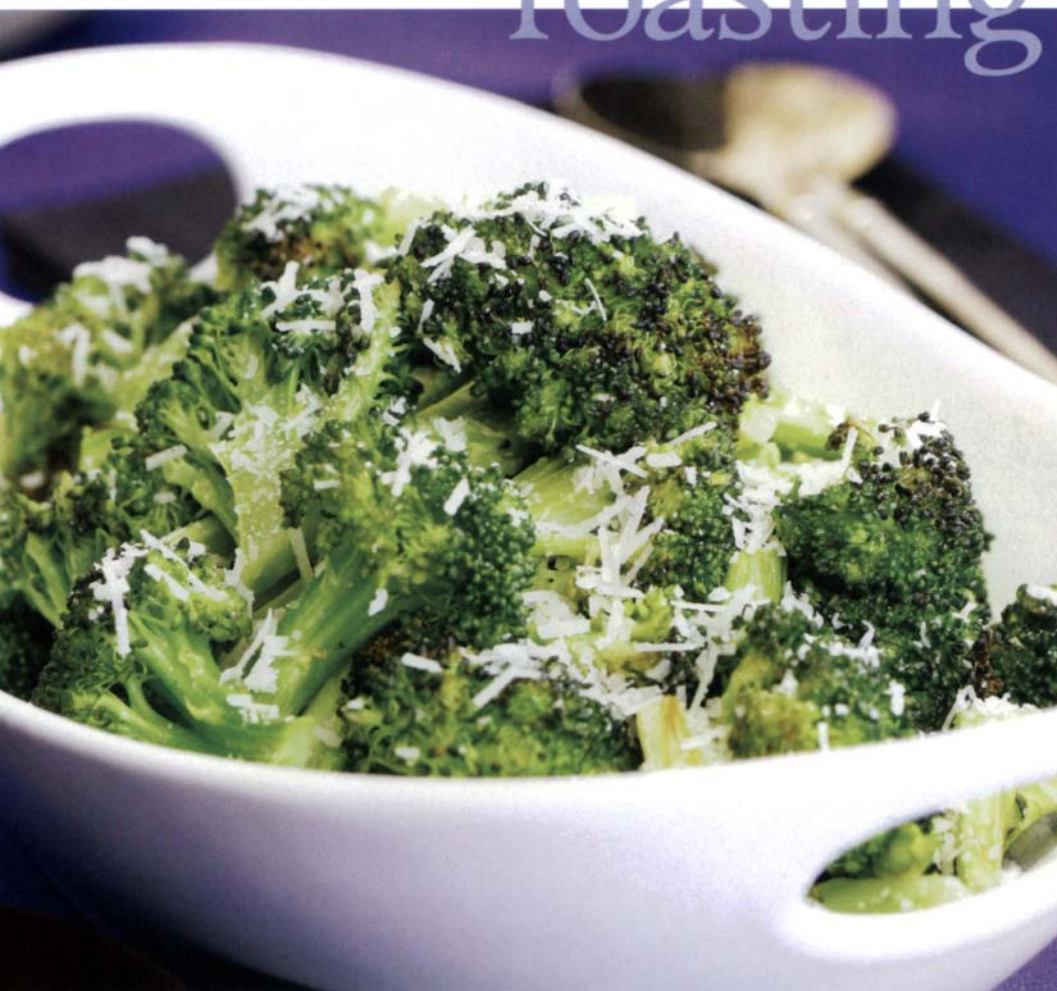
boiling is the fastest method

for cooking broccoli. I usually use it when I'm serving broccoli at room temperature (in a salad, for example). Boiled broccoli will continue to cook after it comes out of the pot, so cool it quickly. Plunging it in ice water preserves the bright green color, but I find that it softens the flavor and texture. Instead, I spread boiled broccoli on a baking sheet and let it cool at room temperature. (If you think you've overcooked the broccoli, put the baking sheet in the refrigerator to cool.)

sautéing gives a golden edge

to broccoli. A large, very hot skillet is crucial to this method. After adding the broccoli, I like to add a little water to the skillet; this creates steam that speeds up the cooking. Once the water evaporates, don't stir too frequently, or you'll interfere with the browning. (If the pan begins to smoke or scorch before the broccoli is tender, add another drizzle of oil and lower the heat.) I choose this method not only when I want browning, but when I combine broccoli with other vegetables.

roasting



Roasted Broccoli with Lemon & Pecorino

Serves four.

1½ pounds broccoli
¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice; more to taste
⅓ cup freshly grated Pecorino Romano

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F.

Tear off any broccoli leaves and trim the bottoms of the stems. Cut the florets just above where they join the large stem, and then cut each floret through its stem (but not the buds) so that each piece is about ¼ inch thick at the stem end. Using a vegetable peeler or paring knife, peel the tough outer skin from the large stem, removing as little flesh as possible. Cut the stem into baton-shaped pieces about ¼ inch wide and 2 inches long.

Put the florets and stem pieces on a rimmed baking sheet, drizzle with the olive oil, sprinkle with the salt, and toss well to combine. Spread the broccoli into an even layer and roast until tender and golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the broccoli to a serving platter, toss with the lemon juice to taste and the grated Pecorino.

Getting broccoli ready for cooking



Snap off any leaves and cut the florets just above where they join the main stem. Use a vegetable peeler to remove the tough outer layer of the stem. (A paring knife works as well, but be careful not to remove too much flesh.)



Cut the florets into the size you need, but don't cut through the buds—instead, use a small knife to cut lengthwise through the stem. This method lets the florets separate easily but keeps the buds intact. You get fewer “bud crumbs” (which can burn easily) in the pan, and the florets will retain their tree-like form.



You'll end up with intact florets, some of which will have a flatter surface area on the stems; this helps them brown easier. I like to cut the large broccoli stem into baton-shaped pieces.

slow-cooking

Slow-Cooked Broccoli with Garlic & Pancetta

Serves four.

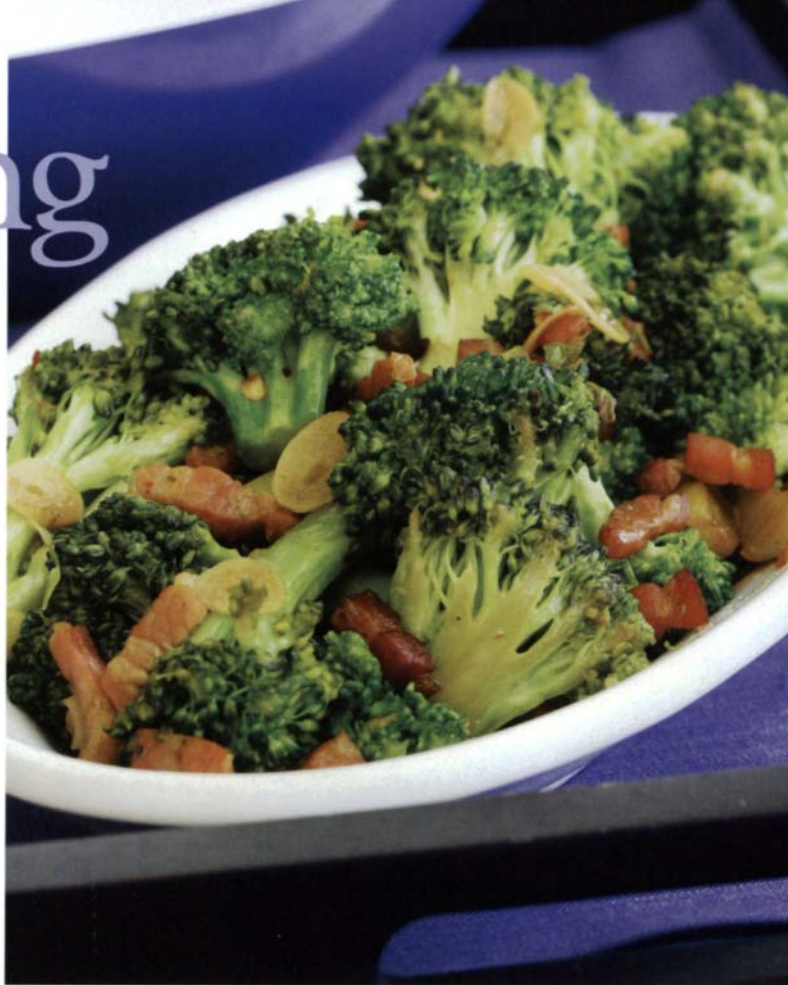
This dish can be served warm or at room temperature. It's delicious on its own, or serve it on grilled bread rubbed with garlic.

- 1¼ to 1½ pounds broccoli (about 1 bunch)**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 ounces pancetta, sliced ¼ inch thick and cut crosswise into ¼-inch-wide pieces (½ cup)**
- 8 medium cloves garlic, thinly sliced**
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt; more to taste**
- ¼ teaspoon dried red chile flakes**

Tear off any broccoli leaves and trim the bottoms of the stems. Cut the florets just above where they join the large stem, and then cut each floret through

its stem (but not the buds) so that each piece is about ¼ inch thick at the stem end. Using a vegetable peeler or paring knife, peel the tough outer skin from the large stem, removing as little flesh as possible. Cut the stem into baton-shaped pieces about ¼ inch wide and 2 inches long.

Heat the oil in a 12-inch skillet over medium heat. Add the pancetta and cook until it's translucent and just starting to render its fat, about 2 minutes. Add the broccoli, garlic, salt, and chile flakes; stir to combine. Reduce the heat to medium low and cook uncovered, stirring every 5 to 10 minutes, until the broccoli is tender and slightly browned, about 45 minutes total. Taste and add more salt, if necessary. Let cool briefly and serve.



sautéing



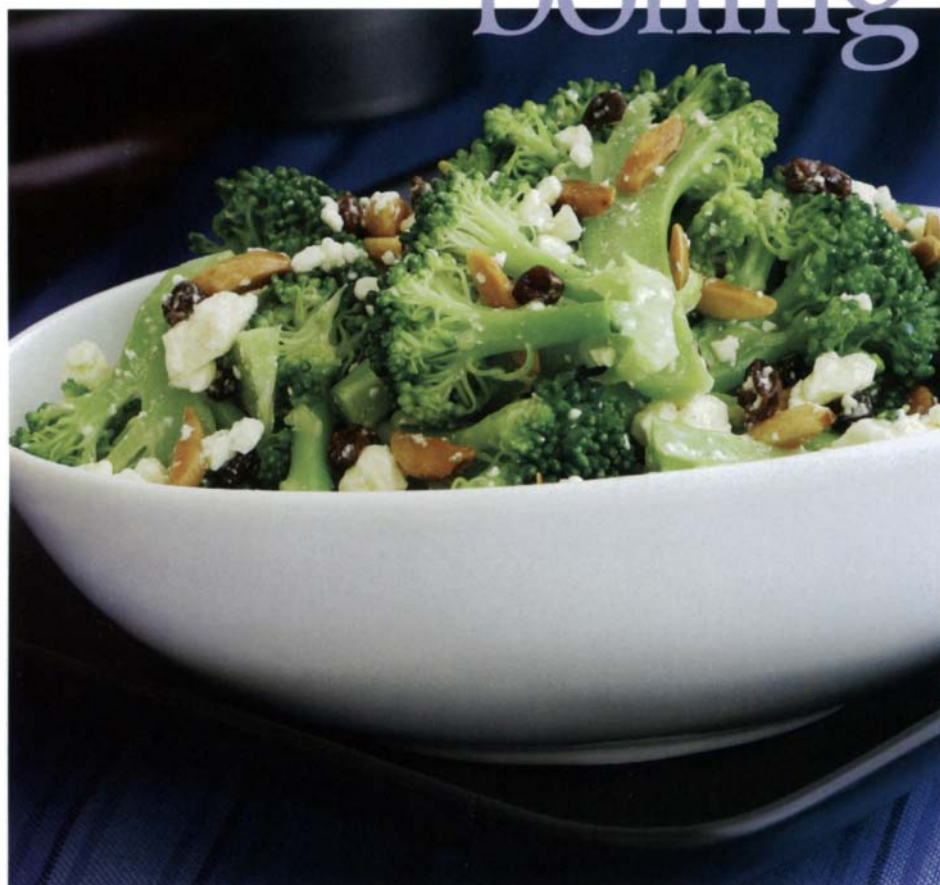
Broccoli & Cauliflower Sauté with Garlic & Ginger

Serves four as a main course; six as a side dish.

This makes a tasty vegetarian meal when served with rice and a yogurt sauce, but I also like it as a side dish for grilled lamb chops.

- 1 pound broccoli**
- 1 small head cauliflower (about 1¼ pounds)**
- 9 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil; more as needed**
- Kosher salt**
- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced**
- Large pinch dried red chile flakes; more to taste**
- Pinch saffron threads, crumbled**
- ½ teaspoon yellow mustard seeds**
- ½ teaspoon brown or black mustard seeds**
- 4 medium cloves garlic, finely chopped**
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh ginger**
- ⅓ cup chopped fresh cilantro**
- 1 lime, cut into wedges**

boiling



Tear off any broccoli leaves and trim the bottoms of the stems. Cut the florets just above where they join the large stem, and then cut each floret through its stem (but not the buds) so that each piece is about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick at the stem end. Using a vegetable peeler or paring knife, peel the tough outer skin from the large stem, removing as little flesh as possible. Cut the stem into baton-shaped pieces about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide and 2 inches long. Cut the core out of the cauliflower to separate the florets, and then cut each floret through its stem so that it's about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch thick at the stem end. Discard the core.

Set a 12-inch skillet over high heat. Pour in 3 tablespoons of the olive oil and then add the broccoli florets and stem pieces. Season with salt and carefully add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water. Reduce the heat to medium high and cook, stirring occasionally, until the broccoli is tender and browned in spots, 8 to 10 minutes. (If the pan begins to scorch before the broccoli is cooked, add another 1 tablespoon olive oil and reduce the heat a little. If the pan does scorch,

rinse and dry the pan before cooking the cauliflower.) Transfer the broccoli to a large bowl. Wipe out the pan and cook the cauliflower the same way. Add the cooked cauliflower to the bowl with the broccoli.

Wipe out the pan (if it's scorched, rinse and dry it) and return it to the stovetop over medium heat. Add 2 tablespoons olive oil, the onion, chile flakes, and saffron; season with salt. Sauté, stirring frequently, until the onion is golden brown and tender, about 8 minutes. Push the onion to one side and add 1 tablespoon olive oil and the yellow and brown or black mustard seeds. Let the seeds sizzle for 1 minute and then add the garlic and ginger. Cook, stirring, for 1 minute more—be careful not to let them burn.

Return the broccoli and cauliflower to the pan, stir to combine, and cook until hot, about 2 minutes. Taste and add salt if necessary. Transfer to a platter, sprinkle the cilantro on top, and serve the lime wedges on the side.

Broccoli Salad with Feta, Olive-Oil-Fried Almonds & Currants

Serves four to six.

The combination of sweet and salty makes this salad an ideal antipasti course, or try it as a side dish for grilled chicken or swordfish.

1 pound broccoli
1½ tablespoons dried currants
1 medium clove garlic
Kosher salt
2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar
Pinch cayenne
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup blanched, slivered almonds
3 ounces feta (preferably French), crumbled (about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
⅓ cup roughly chopped fresh cilantro (optional)

Bring a large pot of generously salted water to a boil over high heat.

Meanwhile, tear off any broccoli leaves and trim the bottoms of the stems. Cut the florets just above where they join the large stem, and then cut each floret lengthwise in half or in quarters through its stem (but not the buds). The top of each floret should be about the size of a quarter. Using a vegetable peeler or paring knife, peel the tough outer skin from the large stem, removing as little flesh as possible. Cut the stem into baton-shaped pieces about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch wide and 2 inches long.

Boil the florets and stem pieces until they're tender (pierce with a paring knife or taste a piece) but still offer a bit of resistance, about 3 minutes. Drain the broccoli, spread it on a baking sheet in an even layer, and set aside to cool—it will continue to cook as it cools.

Put the currants in a small bowl, add enough hot water to cover, and let sit until softened, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, using a mortar and pestle or the flat side of a chef's knife, mash the garlic to a paste with a pinch of salt. Transfer the garlic to a small bowl and add the vinegar and cayenne. Let sit for about 10 minutes.

Warm 1 tablespoon of the oil in a small sauté pan over medium heat. Add the slivered almonds and fry, stirring frequently, until golden brown, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer to a plate lined with paper towels and season with salt.

Drain the currants. Whisk the remaining 4 tablespoons oil into the vinegar mixture. Just before serving, combine the broccoli, currants, feta, and half of the almonds in a large bowl. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and toss gently to combine. Taste and season with a pinch more salt if necessary. Transfer to a serving platter and sprinkle with the remaining almonds and the cilantro, if using.

Tasha DeSerio, the proprietor of Olive Green Catering in Berkeley, California, teaches and writes about cooking. ♦

Forget Take-Out

You Can Make Kung Pao Chicken at Home

BY TONY ROSENFELD

As much as I love true wok cooking, I often have to improvise a bit when I make Chinese food at home. That's because my home kitchen, perhaps like yours, isn't equipped for too much culinary craziness. My stovetop can only create so much sizzle, and once it does get going, the creaky exhaust fan fights to keep up. So I've learned a few tricks over the years to reproduce my favorite Chinese dishes without smoking up the house or running across town to pick up specialty ingredients. Kung Pao chicken, an iconic Sichuan chicken stir-fry with a sweet and spicy sauce, is one of my recent successes.

My take on Kung Pao chicken includes a few ingredient tweaks. While Sichuan chiles fuel a traditional Kung Pao, I've found that almost any good dried chile will stand in nicely (try small Thai chiles, which are available in many markets). Although black rice vinegar gives Kung Pao its customary tang, balsamic vinegar is a fine substitute. And while the peanuts are generally left whole in traditional Kung Pao, I find that chopping the

nuts helps incorporate them better into the dish.

I do have a well seasoned wok, but for this dish, I generally pull out a large, heavy skillet. It's great for cooking a large batch of chicken—the pan's wide surface area heats up evenly on a flat stovetop and sears efficiently without unnecessary smoke. I also like to dredge the chicken in cornstarch before sautéing. This quick toss gives the chicken a light coating, which helps it brown easily, stay juicy, and absorb and thicken the spicy sauce.

With prepping and cooking, the whole dish comes together in about a half hour, which is enough time to steam some white rice to serve alongside. Now you have a quick meal that's better than take-out from your favorite restaurant.

This version of a Chinese classic requires only a large skillet and supermarket ingredients



1

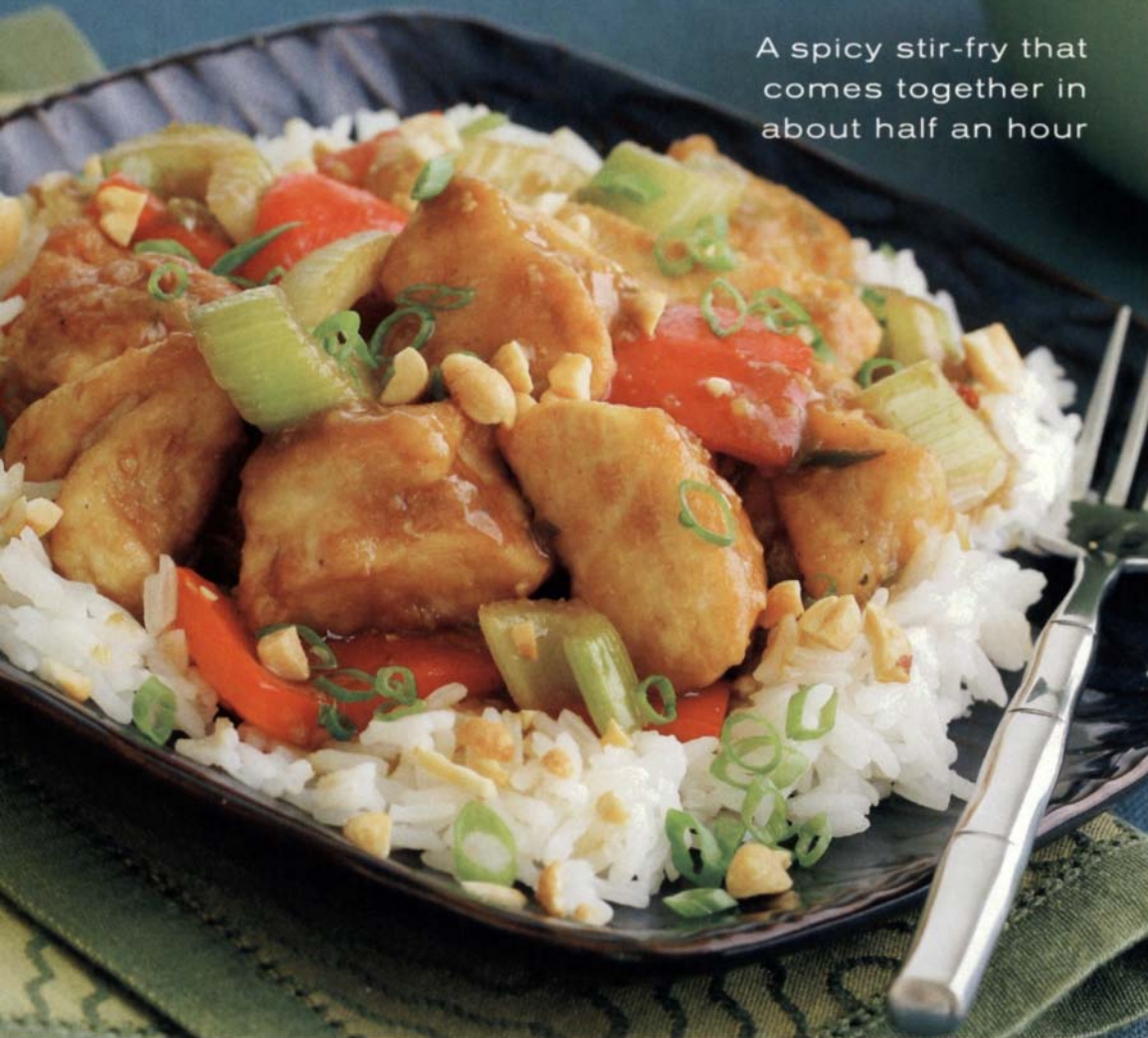
Lightly dredge chunks of chicken in cornstarch to give them a protective coating and to help them brown evenly.



Sear the chicken on both sides to give the dish a deep, rich flavor base.



A spicy stir-fry that comes together in about half an hour



Whisk the chicken broth, soy sauce, balsamic vinegar, 1 tablespoon of the cornstarch, sesame oil, and sugar in a measuring cup. In a large bowl, toss the chicken with $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon salt and a few generous grinds of pepper. Add the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup cornstarch and toss with the chicken (you may want to use tongs as the cornstarch has a chalky texture), shaking off any excess cornstarch.

Heat 3 tablespoons of the canola oil in a large (12-inch), heavy-based skillet over medium-high heat until it's shimmering hot. Sauté the chicken, flipping after 2 minutes, until it's lightly browned on two sides, about 4 minutes total (it's all right if the chicken sticks slightly and if the sides of the chicken are still raw). Add the remaining 1 tablespoon canola oil to the skillet. Add the chiles and their seeds, the ginger, and the whites of the scallions and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the red pepper and celery and cook, stirring, until they soften slightly, about 2 minutes. Add the sherry and cook until it almost completely reduces, 30 to 60 seconds, scraping the bottom of the pan to incorporate any browned bits. Give the chicken broth mixture a quick whisk, stir it into the chicken and vegetables, and bring to a boil (the sauce should immediately thicken). Slice into one of the thicker pieces of chicken to see if it's cooked through. If still pink, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook a few minutes more. Serve immediately, sprinkled with the peanuts and scallion greens.

Tony Rosenfeld is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



Stir in the aromatics and then the pepper and celery, and cook until they soften slightly.

3



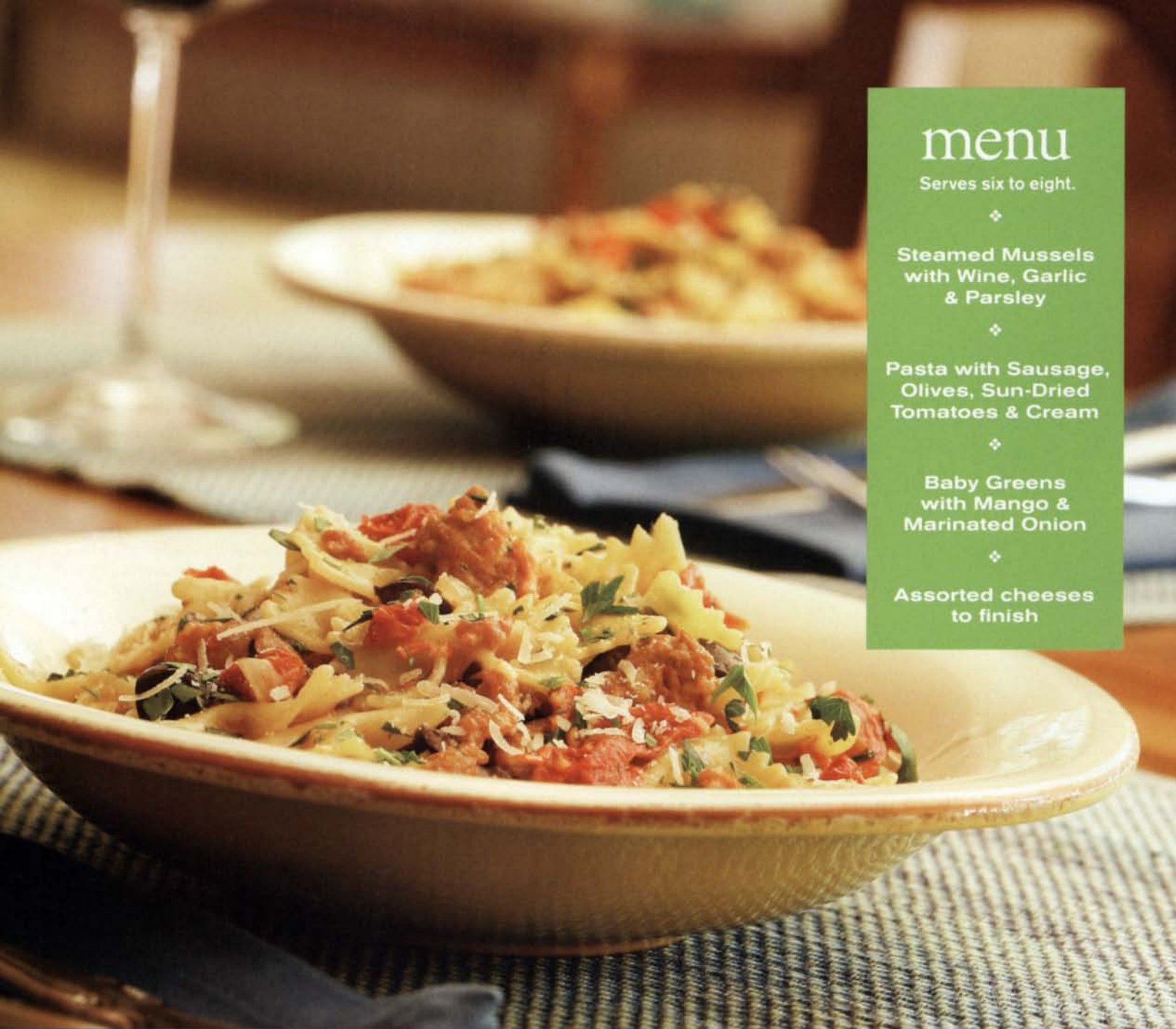
Add a soy-sesame sauce to the pan and, within moments, it will thicken and the dish will be ready to serve.

4

Kung Pao Chicken

Serves four.

- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup low-salt chicken broth
- 2 tablespoons soy sauce
- 1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 tablespoon cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons toasted sesame oil
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons granulated sugar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds boneless, skinless chicken breasts, cut into $1\frac{1}{2}$ -inch pieces
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup canola oil
- 3 small hot red dried chiles, such as Thai chiles or chiles de arbol, split lengthwise (reserve the seeds)
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh ginger
- 6 scallions, thinly sliced, whites and greens kept separate
- 1 medium red bell pepper, seeded and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 2 inner ribs celery, cut crosswise $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup dry sherry
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup coarsely chopped salted peanuts



menu

Serves six to eight.



Steamed Mussels
with Wine, Garlic
& Parsley



Pasta with Sausage,
Olives, Sun-Dried
Tomatoes & Cream



Baby Greens
with Mango &
Marinated Onion



Assorted cheeses
to finish

Friday Night with Friends

Get home from
work at 6, and
have guests over
for a hearty pasta
dinner by 8

BY JOANNE McALLISTER SMART

Around the holidays, I often have too much going on to spend hours in the kitchen, but my husband and I still want to play host. Our solution is a Friday night gathering. Because I have little or no time during the day to cook, I choose dishes that are quick to prepare with ingredients that I can easily pick up at the supermarket. Such dishes can taste just as good as the ones you work on all day (and often even better, because you're not sick of tinkering with them by the time you sit down to eat). The result is the best of all worlds: a great dinner that doesn't break your back, and friends who arrive happy, simply because you've saved them from having to cook.

Quick-cooking ingredients are key

Seafood, pasta, and salad come to mind when I think both "quick" and "entertaining." They can be simple to prepare yet have the potential to feel special. For this menu, I've chosen sweet and briny mussels to add a festive yet casual air to the evening. We often eat them right at the peninsula in the kitchen, slurping down the tender meat and tearing off chunks of bread to dunk into the fragrant broth. Because some people don't eat shellfish, I also set out a plate of sliced salami, smoked sausage, and prosciutto.

The mussels feel light, so the main course can be hearty. This pasta dish is wonderfully satisfying: a little heat in the sausage, a little tang in the olives, but also a soothing creaminess. The few ingredients in the pasta are easy to prep, and the sauce can be made ahead and kept warm until you're ready to cook the pasta. Best of all, with pasta as the main course, there are no side dishes to fret over.

Afterwards, a salad of baby greens, mangos, and tangy marinated onions provides a fresh, bright counterpoint to the creamy pasta. And instead of baking a lavish dessert, I'll put out cheeses paired with something sweet. Unlike traditional dessert and coffee, a cheese course doesn't feel like it's signaling the end of the night, and we can continue drinking the wine that we've been enjoying.

A stress-free 90-minute game plan

Here's a strategy for getting the courses ready to roll in just an hour and a half, so that you only have minimal work to do once your guests arrive.

1 1/2
hours
before
guests
arrive:

Set the table and put on some music.

Open a bottle of white wine to use in the mussels and the pasta. Pour yourself a small glass. Chill any white wine intended for guests.

Chop the garlic for the mussels and the pasta. Slice the shallots for the mussels. Chop the onion for the pasta.

Thinly slice the onion for the salad; marinate it in the vinegar.

Start the pasta sauce: Cook the onions and then the garlic.

Meanwhile, remove the sausage from its casing and chop the olives and tomatoes. Cook them as directed in the recipe and then take the pan off the heat.



Clean the mussels and snip off any beards; refrigerate.

Wash, dry, and chop the parsley for the mussels and the pasta, keeping them separate. Grate the Parmigiano for the pasta.

Dice the mangos for the salad.

Whisk the vinaigrette for the salad.

Wash and dry the greens, put them in a serving bowl, and refrigerate.

15
minutes
before
guests
arrive:

Fill a large pot with well-salted water for the pasta.

Finish cooking the pasta sauce: Add the cream, parsley, and Parmigiano as directed; keep warm on the stove.

Set out the cured meats if you've bought them to supplement the mussels.



As your
guests
arrive:

Pour some drinks.

Take the dessert cheeses out of the fridge to let them come to room temperature.

Heat the pasta cooking water.
Slice the bread for the mussels.

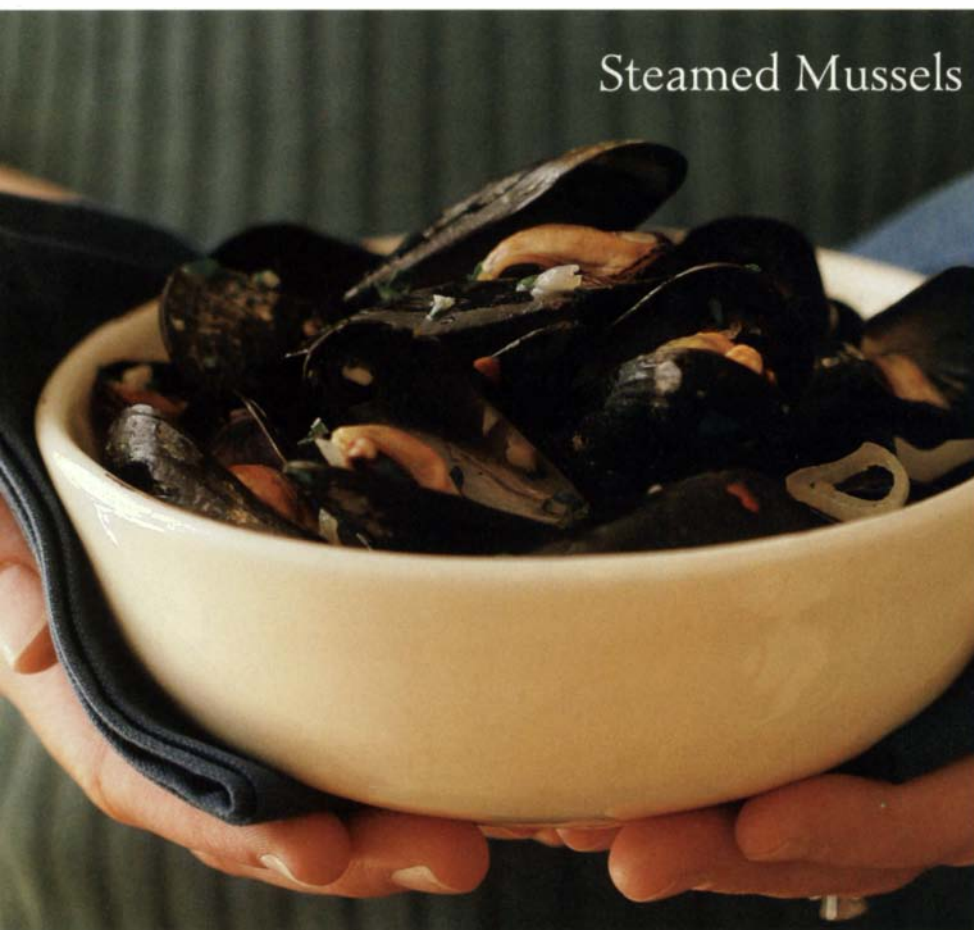
When the
guests
are all
there:

Cook and serve the mussels.

Boil the pasta, toss with the sauce (reheating as necessary), and serve.

Toss the salad and serve.

After dinner, assemble the cheese platter.



Steamed Mussels with Wine, Garlic & Parsley

Serves six to eight.

3½ to 4 pounds mussels
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon unsalted butter
6 medium cloves garlic, finely chopped
4 shallots, thinly sliced
¼ teaspoon crushed red chile flakes
1½ cups dry white wine, such as Sauvignon Blanc or any other crisp, herbal white wine (see Wine Choices, below right)
¾ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
Good-quality crusty bread, sliced or torn into pieces, for serving

Rinse the mussels well under cold water. Pick them over, pulling off any beards and discarding any mussels that are broken or gaping open.

In a large pot with a lid, heat the oil and butter over medium heat. Add the garlic, shallots, and red chile flakes and cook until fragrant and soft but not colored, 3 to 5 minutes.

Add the mussels, wine, and half of the parsley. Increase the heat to high, and cover the pan. After 2 minutes, remove the lid and toss the mussels well with a large spoon. Cover the pot again and cook until the mussels have opened wide, 3 to 4 minutes longer. Add the remaining parsley, give the mussels a final toss, and divide the mussels and the broth among bowls. Serve the bread alongside.



Pasta with Sausage,

Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream

Serves six to eight.

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
1 medium clove garlic, finely chopped
1½ pounds hot Italian sausage, casings removed
½ cup dry white wine (can be the same wine as for the mussels, above)
1 cup pitted Kalamata olives, coarsely chopped
1 cup (about 6 ounces) oil-packed sun-dried tomato halves, drained and coarsely chopped
1 cup heavy cream
¼ cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
¼ cup grated Parmigiano Reggiano
1 pound dried farfalle or fusilli
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

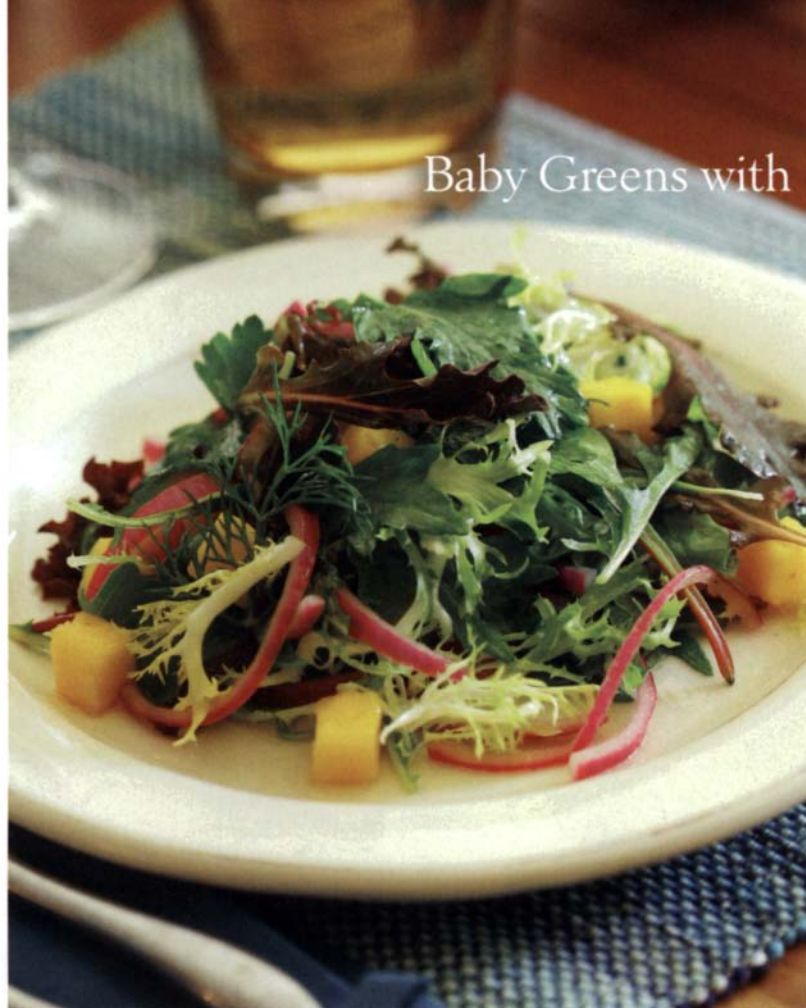
Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a boil over high heat.

Meanwhile, in a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and cook until softened, about 5 minutes. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute.

Add the sausage and cook, breaking it into bite-size pieces with a spoon, until just cooked through, 6 to 8 minutes. Spoon off the fat if it's excessive. Add the wine, increase the heat to medium high, and cook, scraping up any browned bits in the pan, until most of the wine is evaporated, 3 to 5 minutes. Stir in the olives and sun-dried tomatoes and cook for 2 minutes.

Add the cream, increase the heat to high, bring to a boil, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the cream thickens slightly, 2 to 5 minutes. Stir in 2 tablespoons of the parsley and 2 tablespoons of the Parmigiano. Keep the sauce warm over low heat.

Cook the pasta in the boiling water until al dente. Reserve ¼ cup of the cooking water and then drain the pasta. Return the pasta to its pot, add the sauce and the reserved cooking water, and set the pot over high heat. Gently toss the pasta for 30 to 60 seconds and season to taste with salt and pepper. Divide among warm bowls and sprinkle with the remaining 2 tablespoons Parmigiano and 2 tablespoons parsley.



Baby Greens with

Mango & Marinated Onion

Serves six to eight.

The marinated onions in this salad are tasty on sandwiches, so make a double batch, if you like; they'll keep for a few days in the refrigerator and will soften a bit.

½ cup very thinly sliced red onion (about half a small onion)

⅓ cup red-wine vinegar

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons plain seasoned rice vinegar

2 tablespoons canola or grapeseed oil

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

8 to 10 ounces (six to eight large handfuls) baby greens or mesclun, well washed and dried

2 medium-size ripe mangos, peeled, pitted, and finely diced (about 2 cups)

In a small bowl, combine the onion and red-wine vinegar with a little salt and pepper. Set aside for at least 20 minutes or up to 90 minutes.

In a small bowl, combine the seasoned rice vinegar, canola or grapeseed oil, and the olive oil. Just before serving, generously season the greens with salt and pepper, whisk the dressing, and toss the greens with just enough of the dressing to lightly coat. Divide the salad among six or eight large salad plates. Drain the onion. Arrange the onions and mangos over the greens. Serve immediately.

wine choices

A casual Friday night menu calls for equally unfussy and easy-drinking wines. For starters, a crisp, unoaked white wine with herbal notes is a good match for the mussels. Try the 2004 Canyon Road Sauvignon Blanc (\$8) or the 2003 Bonny Doon Ca' del Solo Big House White (\$10), both from California. A fruity red wine with moderate tannins and bright acidity is the right call for the pasta, and the same wine will also go well with the cheeses. Look for the 2003 Feudo Monaci Salice Salentino (\$9) or the 2003 Da Vinci Chianti (\$10), both from Italy.

—*Tim Gaiser, a master sommelier, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking*



A cheese course is an easy finale

Instead of serving a sweet dessert, I like to put together a selection of cheeses and a few sweet accompaniments. For example, I usually present a wedge of Spanish Manchego on a small cutting board, alongside that country's famous *membrillo* (quince paste; for sources, see p. 78), which comes in a soft slab and is sliced rather than spread.

Alongside, I set out a hunk of good blue cheese and a perhaps a small bowl filled with fig jam. I like to add a more overtly sweet offering, too: Try spreading some good-quality fresh ricotta on small slices of toasted baguette. Over the ricotta, drizzle a tiny bit of honey, grind a little fresh black pepper, and sprinkle a little grated dark chocolate.

Joanne McAllister Smart is the co-author of New Italian Cooking and the editor of the Taunton Press's award-winning book, Cooking New American. ♦

Chocolate Desserts On Demand

For five decadent treats, all you need is a few staples on hand...



...in the pantry

- Bittersweet and semisweet chocolate
- Unsweetened cocoa powders—natural and Dutch-processed
- Baking powder
- Baking soda
- Confectioners' sugar
- Granulated sugar
- Pecans, walnuts, or pistachios*
- Pure vanilla extract
- Table salt
- Unbleached all-purpose flour

...in the fridge

- Heavy cream
- Large eggs
- Unsalted butter*
- Whole milk

* For long-term storage, keep these ingredients in the freezer.

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE

I'm a firm believer that chocolate is the ultimate comfort food, and perhaps that it even possesses medicinal qualities. While the latter might be wishful thinking, I'll bet that chocolate is the first ingredient that jumps to mind for most of us when planning a dinner party dessert, satisfying an afternoon sweet craving, or whipping up a treat for unexpected guests.

Regardless of the occasion, when I'm in need of a prescription-strength dose of chocolate, I rely on some basic baking ingredients to get the job done quickly and easily (see the list at left). By keeping my kitchen stocked with the right staples, I can save a trip to the grocery store and be able to pull together dessert at a moment's notice.

Here, I've included five of my favorite emergency chocolate desserts, from homey brownies to a fancier flourless chocolate cake. They're all pure chocolate indulgences with nothing but a hint of vanilla and salt to highlight their chocolate flavor, and all are made from mostly on-hand ingredients. If you want dessert relatively quickly, go for the Chocolate French Toast, Chocolate Glazed Shortbread Wedges, or Double Chocolate Chunk Fudge Brownies; if your craving isn't too urgent, try the No-Cook Chocolate Puddings or the Flourless Chocolate Cake, both of which need time to chill in the refrigerator.



a double dose of chocolate

Double Chocolate Chunk Fudge Brownies

Yields 12 brownies.

If you use a metal pan, the edges of these brownies will be flat and the texture will be even. If you use a Pyrex baking pan, your brownies will have puffier, drier edges, but it will be easier to get the brownies out of the pan.

6 ounces ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup) unsalted butter, cut into six pieces; more for the pan
2 ounces ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder (natural or Dutch-processed)
 $1\frac{1}{3}$ cups granulated sugar
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon table salt
2 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
 $4\frac{1}{2}$ ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
4 ounces very coarsely chopped semisweet or bittersweet chocolate ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup)
2 ounces ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup) coarsely chopped walnuts or pecans (optional)

Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Generously butter the bottom and sides of an 8-inch-square Pyrex or metal baking pan.

Melt the butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat, stirring occasionally.

Off the heat, add the cocoa. Whisk until smooth. Add the sugar and salt and whisk until blended. Add 1 egg and whisk until just blended. Whisk in the vanilla and the second egg until just blended. Sprinkle the flour over the mixture and stir with a rubber spatula until just blended. Add the chopped chocolate and stir until combined.

Scrape the batter into the prepared baking pan and spread evenly. Scatter the nuts evenly over the batter, if using. Bake until a toothpick inserted in the center comes out with small, gooey clumps of brownie sticking to it, 33 to 38 minutes. Don't overbake or the brownies won't be fudgy. Transfer the baking dish to a rack and let cool completely.

Run a knife around the edges of the brownie and then pry it from the pan in one piece. Using a sharp knife, cut the cooled brownie into three equal strips and cut each strip into four equal pieces. Or, use a bench scraper to cut the brownie in the baking pan and then use a spatula to lift out the cut brownies. The cooler the brownie is, the cleaner the cutting will be, but these fudgy brownies will always leave some sticky crumbs on the knife.

ooh-aah easy



No-Cook Chocolate Pudding

Yields 3 cups; serves six.

I like to microwave the cream in an 8-cup Pyrex measuring cup and use that vessel as my mixing bowl—the pour spout is extremely useful.

1¾ cups heavy cream
2 tablespoons unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-processed
8 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped (1½ cups)
2 ounces (¼ cup) unsalted butter, cut into four pieces
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch table salt
Sweetened whipped cream and chocolate shavings for garnish (optional)

Have ready six 4- to 6-ounce ramekins or teacups. Heat the heavy cream in a small saucepan or microwave until just boiling. Remove from the heat and whisk in the cocoa until smooth. Add the chocolate, butter, sugar, vanilla, and salt, and whisk until the chocolate and butter are melted and the mixture is smooth. Pour the mixture into the ramekins or cups. Depending on the size of your ramekins, they'll be filled about two-thirds to three-quarters of the way. Cover with plastic (not touching the surface of the puddings) and refrigerate until chilled and thickened, at least 6 hours or up to three days. Serve with a dollop of sweetened whipped cream and a few chocolate shavings, if you like.

Chocolate French Toast

Serves two to four.

This recipe calls for challah bread, which isn't a conventional baking staple but is convenient to have on hand. Keep thick slices of this braided egg bread in the freezer so you can turn out this snack at any time.

⅔ cup granulated sugar
1 ounce (⅓ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder (natural or Dutch-processed)
⅛ teaspoon baking powder
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 cup whole milk
4 large eggs
1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
4 1-inch-thick slices challah bread (stale is fine)
2 ounces (¼ cup) unsalted butter

Confectioners' sugar, for garnish (optional)

Fresh raspberries, strawberries, or sliced bananas, for garnish (optional)

In a medium bowl, combine the sugar, cocoa, baking powder, and salt. Whisk until well blended and no cocoa lumps remain. Pour in about half of the milk and whisk until the mixture is a lump-free paste. Add the remaining milk, the eggs, and the vanilla. Whisk until well blended.

Arrange the bread in a single layer in a 9x13-inch baking dish (or similar



vessel) and pour the cocoa mixture over the bread. Turn the bread once to get both sides nicely coated. Poke each bread slice repeatedly with the tines of a fork to encourage the bread to absorb the batter. Let soak, turning every 10 minutes, until the bread is well saturated, 20 to 30 minutes.

Set a griddle or large nonstick skillet over medium heat. When the pan is hot, add the butter and spread to cover the pan. (If using a skillet, you'll need to cook the French toast in two batches, using 2 tablespoons butter for

each batch.) Using your fingers and a large rubber spatula, carefully transfer the bread slices, one at a time, from the batter to the griddle. Cook until the underside looks browned and lightly crisp, 3 to 4 minutes. (Reduce the temperature if the slices are browning too fast.) Flip and continue cooking until the slices are slightly puffed in the center and are bouncy to the touch, another 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer the French toast to plates and serve immediately, dusted with confectioners' sugar and fruit, if you like.

Flourless Chocolate Cake with Chocolate Glaze

Yields one 9-inch cake; serves twelve generously.

FOR THE CAKE:

12 ounces bittersweet chocolate,
coarsely chopped (2¼ cups)
6 ounces (¾ cup) unsalted butter, cut
into six pieces; more for the pan
5 large eggs
1 cup granulated sugar
1½ teaspoons pure vanilla extract
¼ teaspoon table salt
¾ ounce (¼ cup) unsweetened natural
cocoa powder, sifted if lumpy; more
for the pan

FOR THE GLAZE:

4 ounces bittersweet chocolate,
coarsely chopped (¾ cup)
1½ ounces (3 tablespoons) unsalted
butter

Make the cake: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 300°F. Lightly butter the bottom of a 9x2-inch round cake pan and line it with a round of parchment. Lightly butter the parchment and the sides of the pan and dust with cocoa powder. Tap out any excess.

Melt the chocolate and butter in the microwave or in a medium metal bowl set in a skillet of barely simmering water, stirring with a rubber spatula until smooth. Remove the bowl from the water bath and set aside to cool slightly. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the whisk attachment, combine the eggs, sugar, vanilla, salt, and 2 tablespoons water. Beat on medium-high speed until the mixture is very foamy, pale in color, and doubled in volume, 2 minutes. Reduce the mixer speed to low and gradually pour in the chocolate mixture. Increase the speed to medium high and continue beating until well blended, about 30 seconds. Add the cocoa powder and mix on medium low just until blended, about 30 seconds.

Pour the batter into the prepared pan. Bake until a pick inserted in the center comes out looking wet with small gooey clumps, 40 to 45 minutes. Don't overcook. Let cool in the pan on a rack for 30 minutes. If necessary, gently push the edges down with your fingertips until the layer is even. Run a small knife around the edge of the pan to loosen the cake. Cover the cake pan with a wire rack and invert. Remove the

pan and parchment and let the cake cool completely. The cake may look cinched in around its sides, which is fine. Transfer to a cake plate. Cover and refrigerate the cake until it's very cold, at least 6 hours or overnight.

Glaze the cake: Melt the chocolate and butter in the microwave or in a medium metal bowl set in a skillet of barely simmering water, stirring with a rubber spatula until smooth. Pour the warm glaze over the chilled cake and, using an offset spatula, spread the glaze evenly to within ¼ inch of the edge. Refrigerate the cake until the glaze is set, 20 to 40 minutes. Before serving, remove the cake from the refrigerator and let it come to room temperature, 20 to 30 minutes. To serve, cut the cake into small, if not tiny, slices using a hot knife (see From Our Test Kitchen, p. 70).



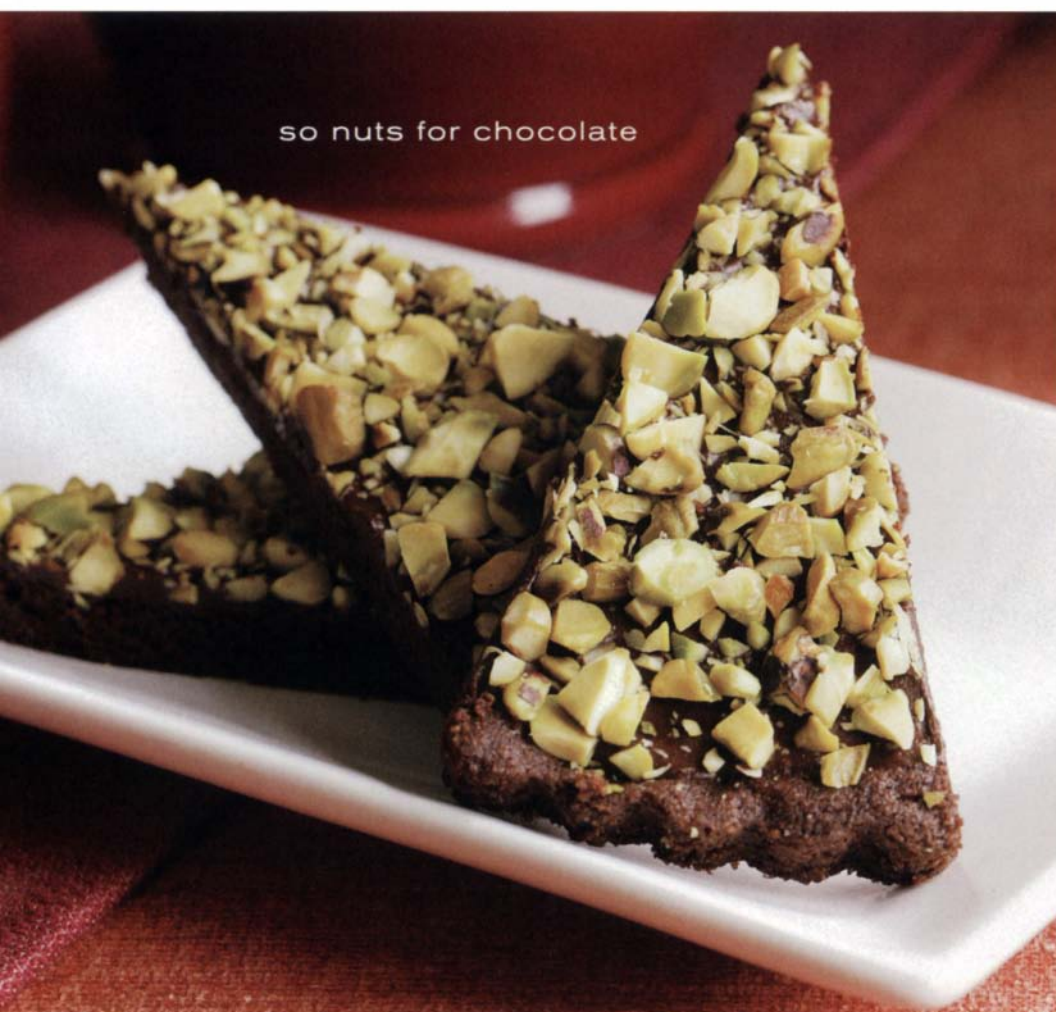
reader review

A *Fine Cooking* reader gave this recipe a real-world test. Here are the results:

"This chocolate cake is very elegant and oh-so rich. I brought half of it to work. There were no words from my co-workers, but there were a few moans. I took this as a good sign that they were enjoying it! (I now have five birthday cake requests.) The no-cook chocolate pudding is outstanding, too, and really easy to make.

—Adele Walker,
Orlando, Florida

(Continued on p. 62)



How to store chocolate

Chocolate will keep for a year at room temperature, if kept below 70°F. Wrap it in a few layers of plastic to keep it as airtight as possible and put it in a dark cupboard, away from strong-smelling foods. (Chocolate, like butter, will absorb strong aromas.) You can store chocolate in the refrigerator or freezer if the cupboard gets too warm, but a moist environment isn't the best. If you do chill your chocolate, bring it to room temperature while still wrapped to prevent condensation from forming, as any water on the chocolate can interfere with its ability to melt smoothly.

—the editors

Abigail Johnson Dodge, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is the author of The Weekend Baker.

Nutty Chocolate Shortbread Wedges

Serves twelve or sixteen.

This is a nontraditional shortbread because it contains an egg yolk, which gives the shortbread a softer, less sandy texture.

FOR THE SHORTBREAD:

¼ pound (½ cup) unsalted butter, at room temperature; more for the pan
½ cup granulated sugar
¾ ounce (¼ cup) unsweetened cocoa powder, preferably Dutch-processed
¼ teaspoon table salt
1 large egg yolk
½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
4½ ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR THE GLAZE:

3 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped (a generous ½ cup)
1 ounce (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into two pieces
½ cup (2 ounces) coarsely chopped pecans or walnuts, toasted and cooled, or chopped pistachios

Make the shortbread: Position a rack in the middle of the oven and heat the oven to 350°F. Lightly butter the bottom and sides of a 9½-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom (for sources, see p. 78).

In a medium bowl, combine the butter, sugar, cocoa, and salt. Beat with an electric mixer on medium speed until well blended. Scrape the bowl. Add the egg yolk and vanilla and continue beating on medium speed until just combined. Add the flour and mix on low speed, scraping the bowl as needed, until the flour mixes in and the dough begins to clump together, about 1 minute. Scrape the dough into the pan, scattering the pieces of dough evenly. Using your fingertips (lightly floured, if necessary), pat the dough onto the bottom (not up the sides) of the prepared pan to create an even layer. Bake until the top no longer looks wet and the dough just barely begins to pull away slightly from the sides of the pan, about 25 minutes.

Shortly before the shortbread is done, make the glaze: Melt the chocolate and butter in the top of a double boiler or in a microwave oven. Stir until smooth. When the shortbread is done, transfer the pan to a rack. Pour the warm glaze over the shortbread and, using an offset spatula, spread the glaze evenly to within ½ inch of the edge. Scatter the nuts evenly over the glaze and gently press them into the glaze. Let cool completely until the glaze is set. Remove the shortbread from the tart pan and cut it into 12 or 16 wedges. Serve at room temperature. ♦

The Bold Flavors of Dried Mushrooms

Keep them on hand to give almost any dish a lift

BY TONY ROSENFELD

Dried mushrooms are my kind of luxury, convenient and affordable. While caviar or foie gras rarely fit my mood or budget, I can always have dried shiitakes, porcini, morels, and chanterelles on hand. And I reach for them often—both on harried weeknights when the clock is ticking and also when I'm looking for an extra boost of flavor to elevate a special dish. The flavor of dried mushrooms is concentrated and intense, and the texture is good and meaty. Like fresh mushrooms, they're terrific in everything from soups to sauces to sautés.

Give 'em a soak. Before using dried mushrooms in a recipe, even if it's a soup or a stew, it's best to rehydrate them in hot water (see the instructions on p. 64). This is necessary for two reasons: First, it plumps up the mushrooms, and, as a bonus, the soaking liquid creates a flavorful broth, which you can incorporate into a dish much as you would any other



Versatile, affordable dried shiitakes

are my go-to mushroom. Their meaty texture and smoky flavor is great on its own or paired with other varieties. Shiitakes are an obvious choice for Asian dishes, filling out soy-based braises or stews or perking up quick stir-fries.

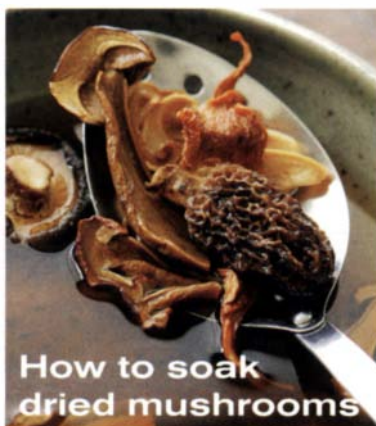
Look for shiitakes with thick brown caps ridged with white. The stems can be woody, so trim them off and discard after soaking.



kind of broth. Second, soaking also helps remove grit from the mushrooms that would otherwise spoil your dish.

Once the mushrooms have steeped, it's easy to add them to braises, stews, or sauces. What I do is brown the meat or fish (if there's any in the dish) and then sauté the rehydrated mushrooms with the aromatics like shallots, garlic, or onion. Because they're moist, the mushrooms don't exactly brown, but this quick toss in hot oil really intensifies their flavor. Finally, I add the mushroom soaking liquid and finish cooking the dish.

The way I see it, there's no set rule for which mushroom to pair with a specific dish. It makes sense to look to the mushroom's native region, using Italian porcini in risotto, shiitakes in Asian dishes, and chanterelles in French sauces and bistro classics like omelettes. But I often mix shiitakes with other kinds of mushrooms, particularly when I'm using a pricey variety like morels. It's a little trick of mine. Shiitakes' flavor perfectly complements that of other mushrooms, and their affordability keeps the meal in the realm of simple, home cooking, just where it belongs.



Put the mushrooms in a medium heatproof bowl. For the recipes on these pages, pour in 2 cups boiling water and weight down the mushrooms with a small plate so the mushrooms are submerged. (If you're using smaller or larger amounts of mushrooms, just use enough water to completely submerge them.) Soak until they're plumped and softened, about 20 minutes (some varieties might take longer). Use a slotted spoon to transfer the mushrooms to a cutting board, squeezing any excess liquid from the mushrooms back into the soaking liquid. Let cool. Remove and discard any tough stems. Coarsely chop the mushrooms. Strain the soaking liquid through a coffee filter or paper towel set in a sieve. Set aside the mushroom "broth" for use in your dish or freeze for another time.

Buying and storing dried mushrooms

The quality of dried mushrooms can vary greatly. My main rule is to buy them from a trusted source (see *Where to Buy It*, p. 78).

If I can get a good look inside the package, I look for mushrooms that have a nice size and shape, and I avoid overly shriveled or crushed specimens.

For long-term storage, I seal dried mushrooms in two heavy-duty zip-top

freezer bags and put them in the freezer where they'll keep indefinitely. For short-term storage (a month or less), I seal the mushrooms in an airtight container or zip-top bag and store in a cool, dark place.

—T. R.

Risotto with Peas & Porcini

Yields 8 cups; serves four to six as a main course.

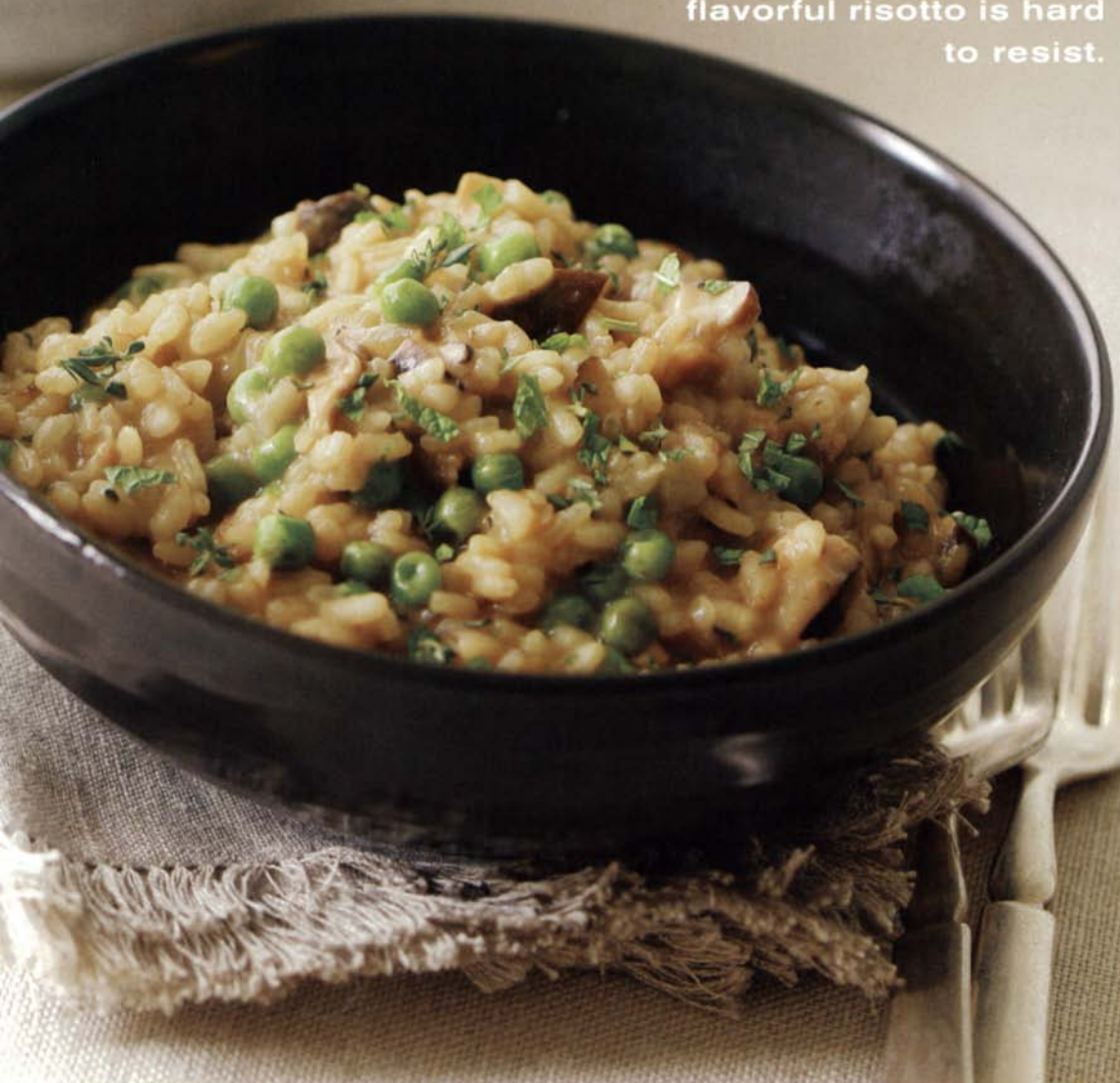
¾ ounce (scant 1 cup) dried porcini (also called cèpes)
1 ounce dried shiitakes (scant 1 cup)
5 cups homemade or low-salt chicken broth; more as needed
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 medium yellow onion, finely diced
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 cups imported arborio or carnaroli rice
⅓ cup dry white wine
1½ cups (7 ounces) frozen petite peas, thawed
1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano
1 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
3 tablespoons chopped fresh mint
1½ teaspoons chopped fresh thyme

Soak and chop the mushrooms and strain the soaking liquid (see the directions at left).

In a medium (3-quart) saucepan over medium heat, heat the chicken broth with all the mushroom soaking liquid. In another medium saucepan over medium heat, melt the butter. Add the onion and a sprinkling of salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft and lightly browned, 5 to 7 minutes.

Add the rice and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the wine and cook, stirring, until almost completely reduced, about 1 minute. Add 1 cup of the hot broth and cook, stirring frequently, until the broth is almost completely absorbed. Adjust the heat as needed to maintain a gentle simmer. Continue adding the broth 1 cup at a time and stirring frequently until absorbed, until the rice is tender but still toothsome (taste a few grains), 20 to 24 minutes from when the first cup of broth is added. You might not need to use all of the broth. Or, if the rice still seems fairly firm when you add the last of the broth, heat and use more chicken broth as needed. Stir in the peas, Parmigiano, vinegar, and half of the mint and thyme. Season the risotto with salt and pepper to taste and serve immediately, garnished with a sprinkling of the remaining mint and thyme.

With mushrooms, peas,
mint, and thyme, this
flavorful risotto is hard
to resist.



Chewy, succulent, and intensely flavorful, dried **porcini** (or cèpes) have a deep, earthy essence that complements Italian seasonings and is delicious with pork and chicken.

Porcini (pronounced pour-CHEE-nee) have thick stems and broad caps and are generally sliced before they're dried. After rehydrating them, you can use them just as you would fresh mushrooms.



Simple ways to use dried mushrooms

When you have dried mushrooms in the pantry, there are lots of quick and simple ways to use them in your everyday cooking. Once you rehydrate them, they can go just about anywhere fresh mushrooms can go.

- ❖ Stir them into pilafs and other rice dishes.
- ❖ Add them to tomato or cream-based pasta sauces.
- ❖ Spoon them onto polenta.
- ❖ Stir them into pan sauces for chops and cutlets.
- ❖ Add them to stir-fries.
- ❖ Sauté with green beans or snap peas.
- ❖ Add them to eggs: Sauté rehydrated dried mushrooms with shallots and butter and fold into omelets, frittatas, or scrambled eggs.
- ❖ Make flavored butter: Pulse rehydrated morels or chanterelles with softened butter and a fresh herb like thyme in a food processor. Use right away or shape into a log, wrap in plastic, and refrigerate. Pats of the butter are delicious on roasted or grilled meats and vegetables.



The golden, apricot hue of
chanterelles

befits their bright, fruity flavor. Their size can vary from tiny blossom-like specimens to impressive 5-inch trumpets, and in the dried form, they can be quite pricey. When rehydrated, their texture is pleasantly chewy; the stems, however, can be woody, so after soaking, trim off tough stems and discard them. Pair chanterelles with eggs and cream sauces.



Wild Mushroom Ragoût

Yields 1½ cups; serves four to six as a side dish.

I like to keep a batch of this tasty little ragoût on hand because it's great as a side dish, garnish, or mix-in. Stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator, it will keep for four to five days.

1 ounce mixed dried mushrooms (like chanterelles, porcini, morels, and oyster; about 1¼ cups)

½ ounce dried shiitakes (⅓ cup; 5 medium caps)

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 large shallots, minced (about ½ cup)

Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

2 tablespoons Cognac or brandy

1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme

¼ cup thinly sliced fresh chives

1 tablespoon heavy cream or unsalted butter

Fresh lemon juice to taste (optional)

Soak and chop the mushrooms and strain the soaking liquid (see the directions on p. 64).

Heat the butter in a 10- or 12-inch non-stick skillet over medium heat until it melts and begins to foam. Add the shallots, sprinkle with a pinch of salt, and cook, stirring, until they soften and become translucent, 2 to 3 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring occasionally, until they start to brown in places, about 5 minutes. Add the Cognac or brandy and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add all of the mushroom soaking liquid, the soy sauce, and thyme and cook until the liquid reduces by about half, 5 to 7 minutes.

If using right away, stir in the chives and cream (or butter). Season to taste with salt, pepper, and lemon juice, if using.

If making ahead, let cool and refrigerate. Reheat over low heat, adding a couple of tablespoons of water, if necessary, to keep the sauce moist. Add the chives and cream and season to taste with salt and pepper and lemon juice, if using.

This versatile mushroom sauté can garnish roasted meat, top grilled bread, or be a side dish all its own.



A strata is a great dish for brunch, as you can assemble it the night before.



Nutty, buttery, and somewhat smoky, dried

morels

go beautifully with spring ingredients like asparagus and spring onions (or ramps, if you can find them). The hollow, honeycombed caps of wild morels can harbor sandy grit. With cultivated varieties this isn't as much of a problem, but to be on the safe side, it's a good idea to rinse morels with water before soaking them.

Leek & Morel Strata

Serves six to eight.

A strata is a savory bread pudding. If you can't find morels, substitute porcini or another mushroom.

- 1½ ounces dried morels (about 2½ cups)**
- 1 ounce dried shiitakes (about ¾ cup)**
- 6 cups cubed (¾-inch) baguette**
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter; more for the baking dish**
- 2 large or 3 medium leeks (white and light green parts only), thinly sliced into half moons (about 3 cups) and washed and drained well**
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 12 large eggs**
- 2½ cups whole milk**
- ¾ cup freshly grated Parmigiano Reggiano**

Heat the oven to 350°F. Grease a 9x13-inch baking dish with butter. Soak and chop the mushrooms and strain the soaking liquid (see directions on p. 64). Set aside ½ cup of the liquid for this recipe and save the remainder for other use. While the mushrooms soak, toast the bread cubes on a baking sheet in the oven until dry and crisp but not necessarily golden, 5 to 10 minutes. Set aside to cool. Turn off the oven.

Heat the 2 tablespoons butter in a large, heavy skillet over medium heat until it begins to brown. Add the leeks and sprinkle generously with salt and pepper (about ½ teaspoon each). Cook, stirring, until the leeks are translucent, soft, and browned in places, 8 to 10 minutes. Stir in the mushrooms and the reserved ½ cup mushroom liquid, raise the heat to medium high, and cook until the liquid almost completely evaporates, 1 to 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.

Beat the eggs in a large bowl. Whisk in the milk, Parmigiano, ½ teaspoon salt, and a few generous grinds of pepper. Arrange half of the bread cubes evenly over the bottom of the buttered baking dish. Scatter half of the mushroom-leek mixture over the bread. Pour over half of the egg mixture. Top with the remaining bread, and then the remaining mushroom-leek mixture. Pour the remaining egg mixture over the strata. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Cover and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or preferably overnight.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Let the strata sit at room temperature while the oven heats. Uncover and bake until the egg sets and the top browns in places, about 45 minutes. Let rest for 10 minutes before serving.

Tony Rosenfeld is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦

Experiment with other dried mushrooms

Once you're comfortable working with these more common dried mushrooms, try some of the more exotic varieties: Wood ears are wonderful in soups and stir-fries. Dried black trumpets and lobster mushrooms add intense flavor to mushroom sauces and pair wonderfully with sautéed seafood. Versatile dried cremini and oyster mushrooms are great with beef or pastas.

How to dice an onion

When I began culinary school, one of the few things I thought I already knew was how to dice an onion. Turned out I was right, and I was wrong. My way wasn't incorrect, but there was a faster and safer way to do it. Here's how I've been dicing onions ever since.

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BY JENNIFER ARMENTROUT



tip: Keeping mashed potatoes warm

You can't hold mashed potatoes directly over a burner, because they'll dry and scorch. The secret to keeping them hot is to hold them in a covered double boiler or in a metal bowl covered with a lid or foil, set over a pan of barely simmering water. This way, the mash stays soft and moist. Check the water occasionally to be sure it's not boiling or fully evaporated.

1 Trim the ends but leave much of the root intact. Cut the onion in half from end to end and peel each half. Lay one half on its cut side. Make parallel vertical cuts from root to stem end, but not completely through the root end. Space the cuts as wide as you want your dice.



2 Make one or two horizontal cuts, again being careful not to cut through the root end. Whether you make one or two horizontal cuts depends on the size of the onion.



3 Make a series of cuts perpendicular to the cuts from step 1, again spacing them as wide as you want the dice to be. Keep the fingers of your guiding hand curled so you don't cut your fingertips.



4 When you get close to the root end and the cutting becomes awkward, flip the onion root side up as shown and slice across it one or two times.



5 Flip the onion back to how it was in step 3. The top is now flat and easier to dice. Finish dicing down to the root. Discard the root and repeat with the other onion half.





A 1-gram jar of saffron can cost \$3 to \$7 or even more, but it will give you a good 20 pinches for cooking.

Buying saffron: the redder, the better

Let's clarify one thing right off the bat. Saffron is indeed "the most expensive spice in the world" by weight, but you need so little when cooking that it's actually cheaper to use than many everyday flavorings—a single lemon often costs twice as much as a pinch of saffron. And a pinch, which is 20 to 25 threads, is all you need in most cases (as in the broccoli recipe on p. 50).

When buying saffron, keep two rules in mind. First, buy saffron in threads only. Powdered saffron can contain other products, and it's difficult to know whether you're buying the pure spice. Second, look for saffron that contains only short, deep red threads (they're actually the stigmas from the saffron crocus). Lesser grades of saffron include threads with some yellow areas (which is the style part of the flower). This isn't a bad thing, but the yellow part doesn't have the same coloring and flavoring power as the red stigmas, so the saffron isn't as potent.

—Sarah Jay, executive editor

Treviso: a more delicate radicchio

If your market has an especially good produce section, then you may have encountered a vegetable that looks like a head of romaine lettuce crossed with a radicchio. This isn't a new hybrid; it's a variety of radicchio that's long been popular in Italy. *Radicchio rosso di Treviso*, commonly known as Treviso in the U.S., has elongated, variegated red leaves that taste more delicate and less bitter than the more familiar ball-shaped *Radicchio rosso di Chioggia*. Raw Treviso adds vivid color and a juicy crunch to salads, but this vegetable also stands up well to cooking. It's particularly tasty when halved lengthwise and grilled or broiled until slightly softened and lightly charred, and then garnished with olive oil, balsamic vinegar, and shavings of Parmigiano Reggiano. For a real treat, wrap the halves in thinly sliced pancetta or bacon before grilling. Try substituting Treviso in recipes that call for radicchio, such as the one below, or even endive.

—Allison Ehri, test kitchen associate



Treviso adds vivid color and a juicy crunch to salads.

Radicchio, Endive & Grapefruit Salad

Serves six.

- 1 grapefruit
- 3 tablespoons walnut oil
- Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 head radicchio or Treviso, leaves separated and cut into strips
- 1 head endive, torn into spears
- ½ small red onion, thinly sliced and rinsed in cold water
- 1 3-ounce log soft goat cheese
- ¼ cup toasted, chopped walnuts

Cut away both ends of the grapefruit. Set the fruit on the work surface and, with a sharp knife, cut away the skin and white pith in wide bands. Hold the peeled fruit over a bowl and begin cutting away each segment from the membrane by sliding the knife between the membrane and

flesh on one side of a segment and then on the other side, cutting the segment free. When you've removed all the segments, squeeze the membranes to get any remaining juice. Set the segments aside and strain the juice. You should have about 3 tablespoons juice. Whisk the juice with the walnut oil. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Arrange the radicchio and endive on plates. Garnish with grapefruit sections and red onion.

Heat the oven to 350°F. Roll the goat cheese log in the walnuts and slice the cheese into six medallions. Arrange the medallions on a small baking sheet and bake for 5 to 6 minutes. They should be just warm, not soft and gooey. Set a piece of the goat cheese on top of each salad. Drizzle with the vinaigrette and serve.

—Mark Bliss, *Fine Cooking* #11



To judge ripeness of persimmons know your variety

This time of year in the produce section of your local market, you're likely to stumble upon a crate or two of silky, red-orange globes that look somewhat like tomatoes—but taste very different. They're persimmons, and you'll probably see two basic varieties: Hachiya and Fuyu. In season from October through December, both have a flavor that's predominantly sweet and sometimes hints of honey and plums. But they aren't necessarily interchangeable in recipes because the variety determines whether you eat them when they're soft or firm.

Hachiya persimmons have a distinctive acorn shape and thin, deep orange skins. When firm and immature, they contain high levels of tannins that make them astringent and unpalatable. As the fruit ripens, the tannins fade and the flesh becomes sweet and very juicy. A fully ripe Hachiya feels very soft and its flesh has the consistency of dense jelly. You can scoop out the pulp with a spoon and simply eat it, or purée the skinned flesh for smoothies and flavorful fruit sauces. Hachiya

purée is also tasty in cookies and cake batters.

Fuyu persimmons look a little like flattened tomatoes, ranging in color from pale to bright orange. Unlike Hachiyas, ripe Fuyus have a firm texture and can be eaten when still crisp—although they're at their best when allowed to soften just a little. Try slicing a crisp Fuyu like an apple and add it to a salad, or pair a slightly soft Fuyu with goat cheese. Peeling is optional. They're also delicious poached in sweetened wine, just like a pear.

Regardless of variety, look for plump persimmons with smooth, shiny, orange skin free of cracks or blemishes. Buy ripe persimmons only if you plan to eat them within a day or two, and store them in the fridge. Unripe persimmons can take a few days to ripen—keep them at room temperature until ripe. You can hasten ripening by putting them in a closed paper bag at room temperature with an apple (apples release ethylene, a gas that helps fruit ripen faster).

—Laura Giannatempo,
assistant editor



tip:
You don't need an olive pitter to pit an olive

There's an olive-pitting tool somewhere in the test kitchen, but I never use it. Instead, I use my chef's knife or a small skillet or saucepan. The action is the same for both tools: Apply pressure with the bottom of the pan or the side of the knife until the olive splits, exposing the pit enough that it can be plucked away by hand. For soft black olives, I use the knife. For firm green olives, I use a skillet because more pressure is needed and the knife might slip. Plus, with a skillet, I can crack more than one olive at a time. —J. A.



To slice a dense cake, heat the knife first

We use this trick with the flourless chocolate cake on p. 61, or for any sticky cake. To heat your cake-slicing knife, either dip it in a tall container of very hot water or hold it under hot running water for a few seconds. Then wipe it dry before cutting the cake. The knife will cool quickly and the cake will start sticking, so expect to rinse and repeat several times. If you have a crème brûlée torch, it's handy for heating up a knife, too.

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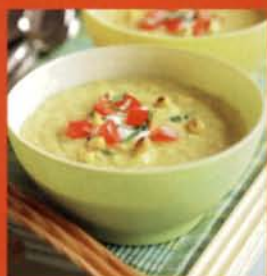
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Basic Vegetable Stock

Yields about 1 quart.

Avoid onion skins and carrot tops as they'll make the stock bitter; trimming or peeling other vegetables is optional. Scrub or rinse all vegetables well, especially if they're not peeled.

1½ tablespoons unsalted butter or olive oil
2 cups large diced yellow onion
2 cups large diced outer ribs celery
1 cup large diced leek tops
1 cup large diced fennel tops or bulbs
¾ cup large diced carrot
1 head garlic, halved crosswise
8 fresh parsley stems
2 sprigs fresh thyme

Heat the butter or oil over medium-low heat in a large stockpot. Add the remaining ingredients and cook uncovered, stirring frequently, until they have softened and released their juices, about 30 minutes (don't let them brown). Add enough cold water to the pot to just cover the vegetables, about 4 cups. Bring to a gentle simmer, cover, and cook without stirring until the stock is flavorful, about 45 minutes (adjust the heat as needed to maintain a gentle simmer). Strain the stock immediately through a fine sieve, pressing gently on the vegetables. Let cool to room temperature and then store in the refrigerator for up to a week, or freeze for up to six months.

Taking **stock** of vegetables

Leek tops, fennel stalks, parsley stems, corn cobs, mushroom stems—to some people these are trash or compost, but to others, they're the start of something delicious: vegetable stock. For dishes that feature vegetables, like corn chowder or butternut squash risotto, vegetable stock can be a better choice than chicken broth because it's lighter and sweeter, and its flavor won't com-

pete with the starring ingredients the way chicken broth might. And if you're a vegetarian, vegetable stock is a key substitute in recipes that would be vegetarian if not for chicken or beef broth.

We've yet to find a brand of canned vegetable stock that we like. That's why we came up with this basic recipe, plus some suggestions for embellishing it to suit your needs.

Customize your stock

The recipe at left makes a nicely balanced vegetable stock that's good for almost any dish, but you can adjust it depending on the trimmings you have or the dish you're using it in. If you're making mushroom soup with marjoram in it, you might add 2 cups mushroom trimmings and a sprig of marjoram to the stock recipe. Here are ideas for other additions. Depending on how dominant a flavor you want, use 1 to 4 cups of these enhancement vegetables.

Assertive flavors

Use these vegetables or their trimmings judiciously and only when you want to emphasize the vegetable's flavor (for example, using an asparagus-enhanced stock in an asparagus soup).

Asparagus	Cauliflower
Beets and beet greens (will turn the stock pink)	Potato (may cloud the stock)
Broccoli	Rutabaga
Brussels sprouts	Turnips
Cabbage	

Herbs

Tender, leafy herbs such as basil, cilantro, and tarragon add a decidedly fresh flavor to a stock. Add four to eight stems to the basic recipe. Tarragon is strong, so use it sparingly. Woody herbs such as marjoram, oregano, rosemary, and sage are more potent and the stems can impart a bitter flavor if left in a stock, so just use a couple of sprigs and strain immediately.

Subtle flavors

Use these vegetables or their trimmings with confidence.

Celery root	Summer squash
Corn cobs	Swiss chard
Eggplant	Winter squash (seeds and stringy insides, too)
Mushrooms	
Parsnips	
Tomatoes	

tip: Instead of tossing out vegetable trimmings, stash them in the freezer until you have enough to make stock.

—Allison Ehri, test kitchen associate

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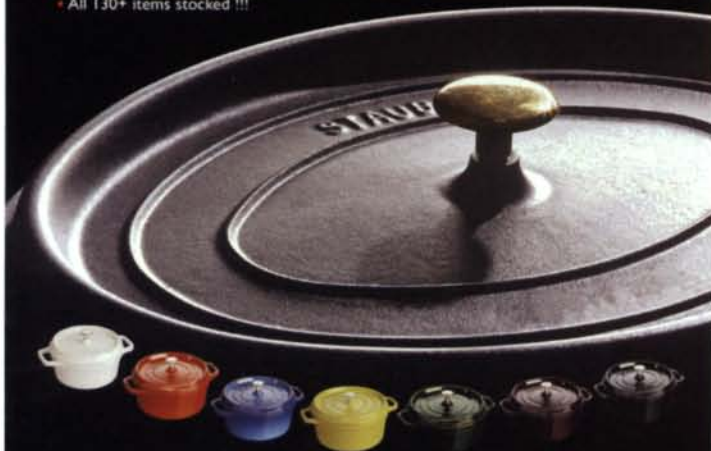
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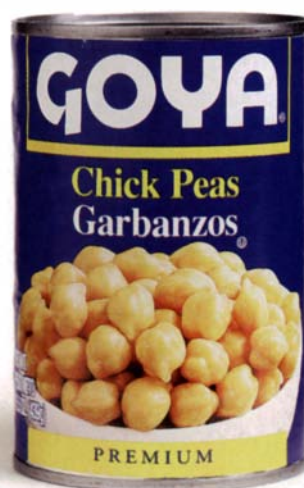
Canned chickpeas

The pleasantly nutty flavor and creamy texture of chickpeas—also called garbanzo beans—makes them a delightful addition to salads, soups, and stews. And, of course, they're the starring ingredient in hummus. But since soaking and cooking dried chickpeas isn't always practical, we often reach for canned chickpeas as a handy alternative. Together with most beans, chickpeas are among the few foods whose flavor doesn't seem to be dramatically altered by the canning process. We like them to be firm but also smooth and buttery (never gritty or mealy), to have a clean, bean-like flavor, and to hold together well.

When we conducted a blind tasting of six widely available canned chickpea brands, we found that there was considerable variety in flavor, texture, and appearance. The clear winner was Goya, but panelists also enjoyed Pastene and Bush's.

—Laura Giannatempo, assistant editor

Top Pick



GOYA
89¢ (15½ ounces)

A smooth, creamy texture, a nicely balanced salt level, and a sweet, nutty bean flavor made these chickpeas our hands-down favorite. "By far the most attractive peas in the whole bunch," said one taster. Large and firm, with no split skins, their handsome appearance would easily hold up in soups, stews, and salads.

Runners-up Chickpeas numbered in order of preference; prices will vary.



2 PASTENE
\$1.19 (15 ounces)

These warm, sunny-colored chickpeas had a satisfyingly earthy, beany flavor and a well-balanced saltiness. Despite some unevenness in individual beans, their overall texture was smooth with a pleasant, soft, and giving chew.



3 BUSH'S
79¢ (15 ounces)

These peas were soft and creamy with an enjoyable chickpea flavor and a pleasant saltiness. But virtually everyone on the panel commented on their less-than-perfect appearance: grayish and small with a few split skins. If you're looking for the perfect chickpeas to purée in hummus, this may be your best bet.



4 PROGRESSO
99¢ (19 ounces)

These chickpeas had the panel divided: Some tasters found them nicely chewy with a firm bite and an appealing nutty taste, while others said they were too soft and a bit gritty with a curiously smoky, canned flavor. Almost everyone agreed that they were overly salty.



5 EDEN ORGANIC
\$1.69 (15 ounces)

These chickpeas seemed to be a bit off: Tasters picked up bitter, metallic, and "mineral" flavors that weren't very enjoyable. The texture was firm, if a bit gritty, and some of the skins were slipping off.



6 WALNUT ACRES
\$1.69 (15 ounces)

Distinctly different looking, these chickpeas were quite small and dark with lots of color variations (a few were a very deep brown). But it was their bland, grassy flavor that only vaguely resembled chickpeas and their slightly gritty texture that caused their score to plummet.

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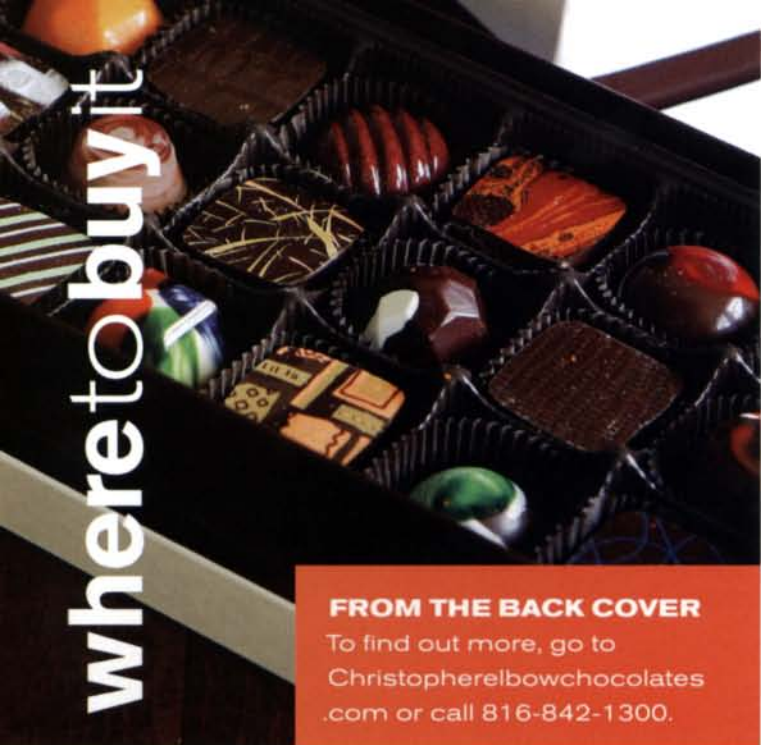
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FROM THE BACK COVER

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Holiday Roasts, p. 40

You'll need a roasting pan for the roasts with crusts; we like this versatile 13½x9½-inch Sur La Table cookware roasting pan, which sells for \$79.95 at Surlatable.com (800-243-0852).

Twice-Baked Potatoes, p. 46

To get the fluffiest filling for the twice-baked potatoes, Molly Stevens prefers to use a ricer; if you don't have one, try the Oxo Good Grips potato ricer, which sells for \$19.99 at Oxo.com.

White truffle oil (for the Porcini & White Truffle variation)

is available at gourmet shops and specialty groceries. To order by mail, Molly suggests visiting Formaggiokitchen.com (888-212-3224), which sells bottles of good white truffle oil for \$28.95 each.

Broccoli, p. 48

Tasha DeSerio's sautéed broccoli calls for yellow and brown or black mustard seeds. The yellow are widely available in supermarkets, but you may have to search further for the brown or black ones. If you can't find them at your supermarket or specialty grocery, you can order



from Kalustyans.com (800-352-3451), which carries them in 4-ounce packs; the brown seeds are \$2.99 and the black seeds are \$3.99.

Friday Night with Friends, p. 54

Membrillo, or quince paste, is a Spanish specialty that accompanies cheese beautifully. Look to Tienda.com (888-472-1022), where a 14-ounce box sells for \$12.50.



Dried Mushrooms, p. 63

The best way to buy dried mushrooms is to inspect their quality visually—they should be intact and not too shriveled. Dried mushrooms are sold in many supermarkets, but if you don't see them, try specialty stores and high-end grocery stores like Whole Foods markets; we also liked the mushrooms we ordered from Gourmet Mushrooms and Mushroom Products (Gmushrooms.com; 800-789-9121).

Chocolate Desserts, p. 58

The recipe for Nutty Chocolate Shortbread Wedges calls for a 9½-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. You can find one at most kitchenware stores or order one (\$3.85) from Sweet Celebrations (800-328-6722). The company also carries offset spatulas (from \$3.19).

Drawers with more

Here's information on where to find the products mentioned on p. 30.

Microwave drawer:

Sharp offers a stand-alone microwave drawer, which can be installed in any 30-inch-wide cabinet opening; the MSRP is \$849. Sharp's Insight Range also features a microwave drawer; prices range from \$1,399 to \$2,349. Visit Sharpusa.com.

Refrigerator & freezer drawers:

GE's double-drawer refrigerator retails for \$1,999 to \$2,299; visit Geappliances.com. Suggested retail prices for KitchenAid's 27-inch-wide double drawer refrigerator range from \$2,399 to \$2,499; visit Kitchenaid.com. U-Line offers three different two-drawer units starting at \$2,059; visit U-line.com. SubZero offers 27-inch-wide double-drawer refrigerator, freezer, and combo units. Suggested retail prices range from \$2,875 to \$3,000; visit Subzero.com.

Dishwasher drawers:

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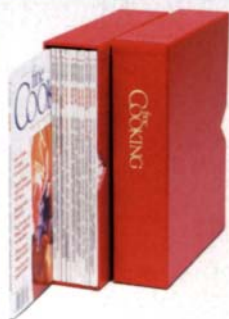
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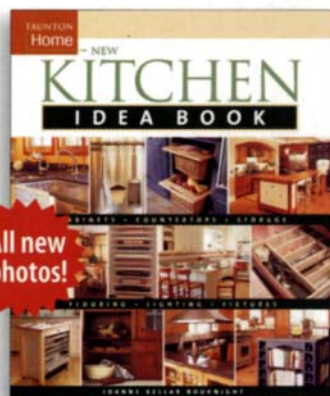
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Recipe	Page	Calories		Protein	Carb	Fats (g)				Chol.	Sodium	Fiber	Notes
		total	from fat	(g)	(g)	total	sat	mono	poly	(mg)	(mg)	(g)	
Letters	14												
Brown-Butter Green Beans with Pine Nuts		150	120	3	8	14	4	3.5	4	15	320	3	based on 6 servings
In Season	16												
Sweet Wine & Honey Roasted Pears		280	90	1	42	10	6	3	0	35	15	5	based on 4 servings
Roasts with the Most	40												
Roast Rack of Pork with a Cranberry-Walnut Crust		670	380	43	22	43	12	14	14	105	380	2	based on 8 servings
Roast Sirloin of Beef with Classic Breadcrumbs, Garlic & Herb Crust		390	170	48	4	19	7	7	2	120	620	0	based on 10 servings
Creamy Horseradish-Mustard Sauce		45	40	1	1	4.5	2.5	1.5	0	10	95	0	per 1 Tbsp
Roast Rack of Veal with a Lemon, Caper & Tarragon Crust		380	160	46	6	18	5	7	3.5	210	790	1	based on 6 servings
Rémoulade		130	130	0	0	14	2	9	3.5	15	100	0	per 1 Tbsp
Twice-Baked Potatoes	46												
Twice-Baked Potatoes with Crème Fraîche & Chives		190	100	3	19	11	7	3	0	30	125	2	based on 8 servings
Twice-Baked Potatoes with Cheese & Bacon		260	150	8	20	17	10	5	0.5	45	250	2	based on 8 servings
Twice-Baked Potatoes with Porcini & White Truffle Oil		200	110	3	20	12	7	3.5	0.5	30	125	2	based on 8 servings
Broccoli	48												
Broccoli Salad with Feta, Olive-Oil-Fried Almonds & Currants		250	190	7	10	21	4	13	2.5	15	450	3	based on 6 servings
Roasted Broccoli with Lemon & Pecorino		280	210	6	12	24	4.5	16	2	5	460	4	based on 4 servings
Slow-Cooked Broccoli with Garlic & Pancetta		260	190	7	11	21	4.5	14	2	15	660	4	based on 4 servings
Broccoli & Cauliflower Sauté with Garlic & Ginger		240	190	3	10	22	3	16	2	0	180	3	based on 6 servings
Kung Pao Chicken	52												
Kung Pao Chicken		470	230	40	20	26	3.5	13	8	95	1090	3	based on 4 servings
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Steamed Mussels with Wine, Garlic & Parsley		260	80	24	10	9	2	4	1.5	60	570	0	based on 8 servings
Pasta with Sausage, Olives, Sun-Dried Tomatoes & Cream		570	290	16	52	33	12	15	3	60	1190	3	based on 8 servings
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Chocolate French Toast		490	190	14	60	22	11	10	4.5	270	450	2	based on 4 servings
Flourless Chocolate Cake with Chocolate Glaze		420	290	6	37	33	18	5	1.5	125	80	3	based on 12 servings
Nutty Chocolate Shortbread Wedges		180	110	2	16	13	6	4	1.5	30	40	1	based on 16 servings
Dried Mushrooms	63												
Risotto with Peas & Porcini		420	70	17	72	8	4.5	2	1	15	430	4	based on 6 servings
Wild Mushroom Ragoût		80	45	2	6	5	3	1.5	0	15	360	1	based on 6 servings
Leek & Morel Strata		320	130	18	29	14	6	4.5	1.5	335	630	2	based on 8 servings
From Our Test Kitchen	68												
Radicchio, Endive & Grapefruit Salad		150	76	4	7	13	3	3	6	5	220	1	based on 6 servings
Quick & Delicious	86c												
Asian Beef in Crisp Wonton Cups		140	25	9	19	3	1	1	0	20	640	1	based on 8 servings
Moroccan Vegetable Ragoût		290	60	9	52	6	1	4	1	0	1030	8	based on 4 servings
Yucatán Pork Tenderloin with Jicama, Avocado & Red Onion		330	140	33	17	16	3.5	9	2	85	380	9	based on 6 servings
Chicken Breasts with Red Thai Curry Peanut Sauce		350	200	31	6	23	8	8	4.5	75	680	1	based on 4 servings
Asian-Style Glazed Salmon with Roasted Mushroom Salad		490	160	44	37	18	3	6	7	105	1420	5	based on 4 servings
Lamb Chops with Pomegranate Red-Wine Sauce		460	240	42	10	26	9	13	2	145	410	0	based on 4 servings
Indian-Spiced Shrimp		280	140	29	7	15	6	4.5	2.5	250	580	3	based on 4 servings

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at Nutritional Solutions in Melville, New York. When a recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the

calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used. When the


quantity of salt and pepper aren't specified, the analysis is based on ¼ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper per serving for entrées, and ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper per serving for side dishes.



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Beautiful to look at, exquisite to eat

As pastry chef of Kansas City's celebrated American restaurant, Christopher Elbow had been experimenting with color, hand painting, and inventively flavored fillings for the restaurant's chocolates. Soon, gourmet markets and high-end stores started clamoring for them and Christopher struck out on his own. He opened Christopher Elbow Artisanal Chocolates in Kansas City, Missouri, in 2003.

Requests for the chocolates got so overwhelming that he had to turn down orders. "You just can't mass produce these," he says, affirming his commitment to remaining small scale. Christopher's imaginative flavorings range from Spanish saffron and Vietnamese cinnamon to caramel fleur de sel and espresso with lemon. Although he sometimes misses the restaurant work, he loves the quieter, more meditative pace of having his own workshop. "My focus is much narrower," he admits, "but I feel like a real artisan now."

—Amy Albert



1. Finger painting the bottom of the mold with four different colors produces a surface look that's loose but elegant. **2.** Christopher lines the molds with white chocolate and taps out the excess for the most even coverage. **3.** With precision characteristic of the best pastry chefs, Christopher fills each choco-

late by hand. He uses flavors that complement but don't overwhelm the chocolate. His passion-fruit and chocolate ganache, for example, is extraordinary for its balance. **4 & 5.** The filling has a velvety texture, and the coating has that glossy luster and snap that's the sign of beautifully crafted chocolate.



BY KATE HAYS

Inspired by international cuisines,

these dishes are bound to impress even the most well-traveled palate. (And you won't need to run to the specialty grocery to find the ingredients—they're available in most well-stocked supermarkets.) Once you've discovered your favorites, you can use elements of these recipes in different ways: Toss leftover sauce from the Thai chicken into noodles, or serve it as a dipping sauce for dumplings or satays. Use the Indian shrimp marinade to flavor chicken or lamb. Or for a great wrap sandwich, roll up the Yucatán pork and its avocado salad in corn or flour tortillas.



Asian Beef in Crisp Wonton Cups

*Yields 24 hors d'oeuvres;
serves six to eight.*

24 square wonton wrappers
½ lb. beef tenderloin
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
½ cup finely diced red pepper (about half a medium pepper)
¼ cup scallions, finely sliced (both green and white parts)
3 Tbs. fresh lime juice (about 1 lime)
2 Tbs. fish sauce
2 Tbs. granulated sugar
1 tsp. minced garlic
1 tsp. chile paste with garlic (or chile garlic sauce)

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 375°F. Using mini (2-inch) muffin tins, press the wonton wrappers down into the tin, laying back the corners to make a defined cup. Bake until lightly browned, 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer to a rack and let cool.

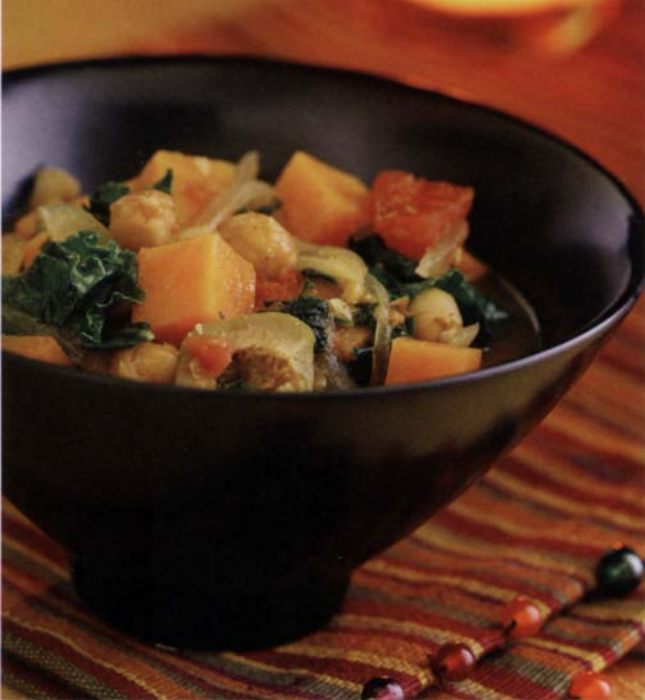
Meanwhile, season the beef liberally with salt and pepper. Turn on the exhaust fan. Heat an ovenproof sauté pan over high heat until very hot. Add the beef and sear, rolling it onto all sides in the dry pan until it's lightly browned, 3 to 4 minutes total. Transfer the pan to the oven and cook until medium rare (130°F on an instant-

read thermometer), 5 to 10 minutes depending on the thickness of the cut. Let the beef rest for 5 minutes and then cut it into julienne (long, thin strips).

Combine the beef, red pepper, and scallions in a medium bowl. In a small bowl, combine the lime juice, fish sauce, sugar, garlic, and chile paste and stir until the sugar dissolves. Toss with the beef mixture. Fill the cooled wonton cups with the filling, about 1 Tbs. per cup.

Note: A few of the wonton cups may collapse during baking; be prepared to bake a few extras, just in case.

Tip: The wonton cups will keep, unfilled, in an airtight container for up to a week. Fill them right before serving or they'll get soggy. You can use a double batch of the mushroom salad from the salmon recipe (over) as an alternative filling.



Moroccan Vegetable Ragoût

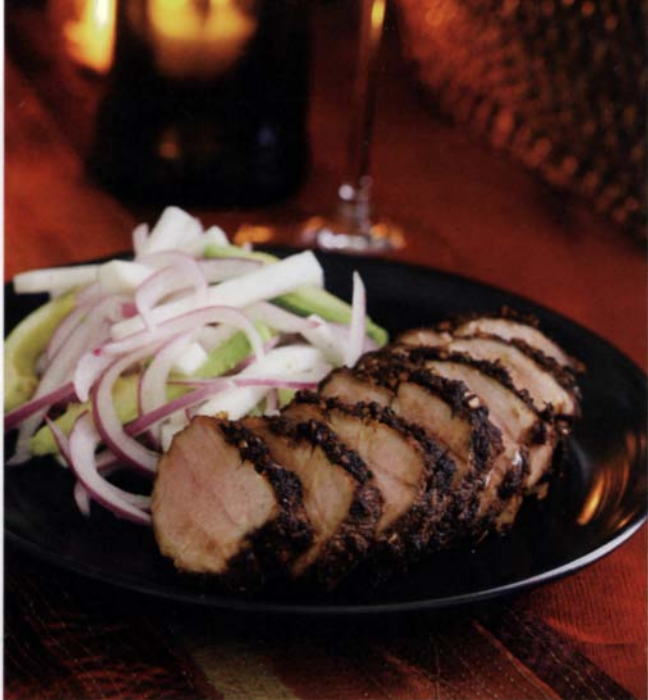
Serves three to four.

- 1 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 medium yellow onion,**
thinly sliced (about
1¼ cups)
- 1 3- to 4-inch cinnamon stick**
- 1½ tsp. ground cumin**
- 2 cups peeled and medium**
diced (½-inch) sweet
potatoes (about ¾ lb.)
- 1 14- to 16-oz. can chickpeas,**
drained and rinsed
- 1 14½-oz. can diced**
tomatoes; with their juices
- ½ cup pitted green Greek or**
Italian olives (see From
Our Test Kitchen, p. 70)
- 6 Tbs. orange juice,**
preferably fresh
- 1½ tsp. honey**
- 2 cups lightly packed very**
coarsely chopped kale
leaves (from about ½ lb.
kale)
- Kosher salt and freshly**
ground black pepper

Heat the oil in a 5- to 6-quart Dutch oven or other heavy pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion and cook, stirring frequently, until soft and lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Add the cinnamon stick and cumin and cook until very

fragrant, about 1 minute. Add the sweet potatoes, chickpeas, tomatoes and their juices, olives, orange juice, honey, and 1 cup water; bring to a boil. Reduce the heat to medium low and simmer, covered, stirring occasionally, until the sweet potatoes are barely tender, about 15 minutes. Stir in the kale. Cover and continue cooking until wilted and softened, about another 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Serving suggestion:
Serve with a green salad
and couscous studded with
toasted almonds.



Yucatán Pork Tenderloin with Jicama, Avocado & Red Onion Salad

Serves four to six.

- 2 Tbs. minced garlic**
- 2 Tbs. pure chile powder**
(preferably ancho)
- 1 Tbs. dried oregano**
(preferably Mexican)
- 1½ tsp. ground cumin**
- Kosher salt and freshly**
ground black pepper
- ½ cup grapefruit juice,**
preferably fresh
- 2 small pork tenderloins (1 to**
1¼ lb. each), trimmed
- 1 small jicama (about 1¼ lb.)**
- 2 ripe avocados**
- ½ small red onion**
- 2 Tbs. fresh lime juice**

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 450°F. In a small bowl, combine the garlic, chile powder, oregano, cumin, 1 tsp. each kosher salt and black pepper, and enough of the grapefruit juice (about ¼ cup) to make a paste. Rub the paste all over the pork and set on a rack in a small

roasting pan. Roast until the thickest part of each tenderloin registers 140° to 145°F on an instant-read thermometer, 25 to 30 minutes. Transfer to a clean cutting board to rest.

Meanwhile, peel the jicama and cut it into matchsticks about 4 inches long and ¼ inch thick. Cut the avocados in half, remove the pits and peel, and diagonally cut the flesh into thin slices. Slice the red onion half as thinly as possible. In a large bowl, gently combine the jicama, avocado, and red onion. Drizzle with the lime juice and remaining grapefruit juice and season to taste with salt and pepper. Slice the pork and divide it equally on dinner plates. Serve with the jicama salad.



Chicken Breasts with Red Thai Curry Peanut Sauce

Serves four.

2 Tbs. chopped fresh ginger
1 Tbs. chopped garlic
½ cup natural smooth peanut butter (I like Teddie brand), preferably at room temperature
¼ cup rice vinegar
2 Tbs. soy sauce
2 Tbs. mirin or granulated sugar
1¾ tsp. red Thai curry paste
4 boneless, skinless chicken breast halves (about 1½ lb. total), trimmed
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. canola oil; more as needed
½ cup unsweetened coconut milk
3 Tbs. minced fresh cilantro

In a food processor, combine the ginger, garlic, peanut butter, rice vinegar, soy sauce, mirin (or sugar), 1½ tsp. of the curry paste, and 3 Tbs. water. Process until smooth, about 30 seconds. Taste to check the heat level and add the remaining ¼ tsp. curry paste if you like.

If the chicken breasts come with tenders, remove them and reserve them for

another use. Between two sheets of plastic wrap, lightly pound the chicken breasts to an even thickness with a meat mallet, a heavy pan, or the side of a cleaver. Season the chicken all over with salt and pepper. Set a large, heavy skillet over medium-high heat and add the canola oil. When the oil is very hot, add two of the chicken breasts and cook until nicely browned, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip the chicken and continue to cook until it's cooked through, another 3 to 4 minutes. Transfer the chicken to a platter. Repeat with the remaining chicken, adding 1 to 2 Tbs. more oil if the pan is dry.

Reduce the heat to low and add the coconut milk and ½ cup of the peanut sauce to the skillet. (Save the remaining sauce for another use; see the introduction, over.) Stir to combine and heat through, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the cilantro. Drizzle the sauce over the chicken and serve immediately.



Asian-Style Glazed Salmon with Roasted Mushroom Salad

Serves four.

5 cups stemmed fresh shiitake mushrooms, or a mix of shiitakes and oyster mushrooms (about 1 lb. before trimming)
1½ Tbs. toasted sesame oil
½ cup tamari or good-quality soy sauce
½ cup mirin
¼ cup rice vinegar
1 Tbs. finely grated fresh ginger (use a rasp-style grater or a ginger grater)
1½ tsp. cornstarch combined with 1½ tsp. water
1½ lb. salmon fillet, preferably center cut, skin and pin bones removed; cut into four portions
½ cup finely diced red bell pepper (about half a medium pepper)
½ cup thinly sliced scallions (both white and green parts from about 1 small bunch)
Freshly ground black pepper

Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. In a large bowl, toss the mushrooms with 1 Tbs. of the sesame oil. Arrange the mushrooms in a single layer on a rimmed baking sheet and roast until softened, 10 to 15 minutes. When cool enough to handle, slice the mushrooms into ¼-inch slices and return them to the bowl.

Meanwhile, in a small bowl, whisk the remaining ½ Tbs. sesame oil with the tamari (or soy sauce), mirin, rice vinegar, and ginger. Set aside ⅓ cup of this mixture and transfer the rest to a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Add the cornstarch-water mixture and cook, stirring, until thickened, about 30 seconds. Remove from the heat.

Line a 9x13-inch baking dish with foil. Arrange the salmon portions in the dish, skin side down and evenly spaced. Using a pastry brush, thickly dab the tops and sides of the salmon with the warm glaze. Use all of the glaze and don't worry if some of it slides off of the fish. Bake until the salmon is cooked to your liking, about 10 minutes for medium rare; 12 minutes for medium; 14 minutes for medium well. (Cut into the thickest part of a fillet to check.) While the salmon cooks, add the red pepper, scallions, and reserved soy mixture to the mushrooms. Toss to combine and season to taste with pepper.

Drizzle the fish with any glaze that has pooled in the baking dish and serve topped with the mushroom salad.



Lamb Chops with Pomegranate Red-Wine Sauce

Serves four.

12 lamb rib chops
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup minced shallot (about 1 large)
½ cup pomegranate juice (such as Pom brand)
¼ cup full-bodied dry red wine
¼ cup homemade or low-salt chicken broth
1½ Tbs. balsamic vinegar
1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves, finely chopped
½ Tbs. honey
2 Tbs. cold unsalted butter, cut into small cubes

Liberally season the lamb chops with salt and pepper on both sides. Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch sauté pan over medium-high heat until very hot. Sear the chops in two batches until well browned on both sides, about 2 minutes per side

for medium rare, 3 minutes per side for medium. Keep the chops warm on a platter covered with foil. Pour off and discard all but about 1 or 2 Tbs. fat from the pan.

Add the shallot to the pan and cook, stirring constantly, until browned, 1 to 2 minutes. Add the pomegranate juice, wine, chicken broth, vinegar, thyme, and honey and cook, stirring, until the liquid is reduced by half, 3 to 5 minutes. Reduce the heat to medium low and swirl in the butter until it melts. Taste and adjust the seasoning with salt and pepper.

Transfer the chops to dinner plates and serve with the sauce.

Serving suggestion:
 Serve with mashed potatoes and haricots verts.

Indian-Spiced Shrimp

Serves four.

2 Tbs. coriander seeds
2 tsp. cumin seeds
¼ to ½ tsp. dried red chile flakes
½ cup unsweetened coconut milk
3 Tbs. minced garlic
3 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
1½ lb. jumbo shrimp (21-25 count), peeled and deveined
2 Tbs. canola or vegetable oil
¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro
2 Tbs. fresh lime juice; plus 4 lime wedges for serving
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper

Heat a small, heavy sauté pan over medium-high heat until hot. Add the coriander seeds, cumin seeds, and chile flakes and cook, shaking the pan constantly, until the spices are very fragrant, 30 to 60 seconds. Grind to a fine powder in a spice grinder.

In a medium bowl, combine the coconut milk, garlic, ginger, shrimp, and spice powder and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 10 and up to 30 minutes.

In a 12-inch nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp and the marinade and cook, stirring and shaking the pan, until the shrimp are pink and cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes, adding 1 Tbs. water at a time if necessary to keep the marinade from scorching. Remove from the heat and add the cilantro and lime juice. Season with salt and pepper and serve garnished with the lime wedges.

Serving suggestion:
 Serve with a basmati rice pilaf.

Kate Hays is chef-owner of Dish catering, based in Shelburne Vermont, where she also does recipe testing, development, and food styling. ♦